

The Unfulfilled Prophecy

Disclaimer I do not own HP, it belongs to JK Rowling.

Summary What if Harry Potter wasn't the chosen one but his brother? Neglected by his parents, Harry Potter leaves home at the age of 6 to no other than Lord Voldemort himself. Mild Dark!Harry

'thoughts'

"speech"

/parseltongue/

1. The Chosen One

Loud childish laughter rang through the house from the level below. A second later, the voice of Joshua Damien Potter could be heard as he squealed; running around the house chasing after Padfoot while Lily Evans chided him and James Potter laughed it off.

Harry James Potter heard all of this, the happy laughter of a family, his family in the living room while he sat alone in his bedroom, staring sadly into space. Life at the Potter's house had been like this for a long time, as Harry could remember. Every year on his birthday, Joshua would receive all of the family's attention while Harry was left alone, feeling somewhat disappointed and neglected. Even the guests forgot about Harry's existence at times, as Harry remembered the incident when he was five years old last year with a frown. The Longbottoms had come to Harry and Joshua's birthday party, yet they forgotten to buy a present for Harry. Harry could still remember how hurt he felt, with tears in his eyes when he realized that.

Life was unfair, Harry thought miserably. It was Harry, always Harry's fault whenever he and Joshua got into trouble. The only person Harry felt was nice to him was Uncle Remus who always talked to him and never once forgotten about his birthday, but ever since he was sent off to some mission or another by Dumbledore, Harry hadn't seen him since and was feeling lonely without anyone to talk to.

Harry didn't understand any of this, why his parents did not want him. All he knew was that a prophecy was made, concerning Joshua and himself. He thought about the prophecy again. Although Harry did not know what it said, apparently Joshua did, and had always gloatingly reminded Harry that he was the "chosen one" with magical powers rival to the Dark Lord's and he would be the one defeating Voldemort and everyone would look up to him as a hero.

What troubled Harry was that everyone did believe that Joshua was the hero destined to defeat the dark lord. Harry knew that it was a long shot that Joshua could even be magically powerful enough to have powers rivaling Voldemort, but he knew better than to tell his parents.

The thought of Joshua's arrogant face made young Harry sad again. Throughout his lifetime, he knew that he was more magically powerful than Joshua, yet Joshua was the Chosen One, not him. He once asked Lily why was this so, after all, didn't Joshua say something about having powers rival to the Dark Lord? If so, wasn't Harry the one to be the Chosen One, loved by his parents?

Flashback

"Mummy..." Harry said softly as he tugged his mother's robes.

Lily Evans turned towards him, irritated at being disturbed by Harry while she was doing some paperwork. James and Joshua were nowhere to be seen, having ran off to play a game of Quidditch without inviting Harry along, but Harry had already gotten used to being left alone.

"What now Harry?" Lily sighed exasperatedly. For the past 10 minutes or so, Harry had been fidgety and nervous, as though he wanted to know something badly, yet he made no move to say whatever he wanted to. 'So much for Griffindor's bravery', Lily thought as she stared down at her younger son, with an impatient look on her face.

"I wanted to ask... why... why is Joshua the Chosen One when I'm magically stronger than he is?" Harry finally said in a small voice.

Lily sighed and she turned to Harry, a frown evident on her face as her eyes hardened at Harry's doubt of Joshua. "It's just Joshua; the prophecy means Joshua and not you. Harry, you shouldn't let your jealousy for Joshua sow the seed of a doubt in you as to who is the Chosen One. Joshua might not be stronger than you now, but later when you start school at Hogwarts, he will be."

"But mummy... why is it not me?" Harry's voice became determined and stronger.

"Because Dumbledore says so," Lily said bluntly, effectively ending the conversation just as the excited voice of James and Joshua came floating into the house as the father and son splattered mud into the living room.

"Joshua honey, how was Quidditch?" Lily's voice became warm all of a sudden as she stood up and enveloped Joshua into the hug while James ruffled his hair, smiling.

It was a picture of a perfect happy family, minus Harry's existence.

Harry stood at the corner, watching Joshua enviously, already forgotten by his family.

End of Flashback

From that day onwards, Harry never questioned himself as to why Joshua was the prophesized child but he learned to accept being his brother's shadow.

'They hate me,' his six year old mind thought sadly, thinking that he would never be as good as his brother. 'They hate me because I'm not the chosen one.'

Harry stared miserably out at his window as he watched Joshua and James having a round of Quidditch before the guests arrived for Harry and Joshua's birthday later on, with Sirius on the grounds, cheering them on as he whooped with laughter. Harry's eyes fell on his mother who stood watching her son with pride on her face that made Harry's heart ached for it to be directed at him.

He pressed his face towards the windows, watching hungrily at Lily's smile in front of him

"Mummy..." he said softly, yearning for her to invite him down, to see her warm comforting smile smiled at him.

As if on cue, Lily turned around and her eyes wandered towards Harry at the window. Immediately her smile vanished and her eyes turned hard and cold. Harry flinched and watched silently as Lily turned her back on him.

Harry's heart broke. That much was obvious, even to a six year old. For a moment, Harry was filled with self disgust, why did his mother hate him? All he wanted was acceptance from his mother, to be part of the Potter family, never to be left out from birthdays and Quidditch matches. All he wanted was for his father to ruffle his hair in a fatherly fashion, grinning as he recounted the days when he was at Hogwarts. Just like how it was with Joshua.

Why couldn't he be loved and cared for with so much adoration and pride in his parent's eyes like when they looked at Joshua? Seeing the happy family on the grounds below him, without him, Harry made up his decision.

It looked like he wasn't going to be part of this family ever, he thought miserably. They don't want him because if they do, they would never have left him alone. "Maybe I was adopted; maybe I was never part of the Potter family... They would be happier if I were not here any longer..." young Harry whispered to himself as he looked at his reflection from the window. He looked nothing like Lily or James, save for the exception of his emerald green eyes and untidy raven hair.

Where could Harry run away to? No one would accept him, he knew. He was recognized by the wizarding world as James Potter, the famous auror's son; Lily Evans, the charming charms master of Hogwarts's son and the brother of the "chosen one", but not as Harry, Harry Potter. All that he would get was being returned to his parents for a round of scolding on how he had embarrassed them and how he loved to 'seek attention' because he was jealous of his brother.

Then inspiration hit him. The one person that he knew would not send him back to the Light.

But he needed to move, fast, before the party started. Harry knew that his absence would not be noticed, but he was not allowing his escape plan to be foiled.

"So? Have you managed to persuade the Potters to let you be their secret keeper instead of that traitor Black?" a high cold voice said dangerously soft.

"M - my Lord, the Potters are adamant on changing their secret keeper. James Potter believes that Black would n- never be- betray him," Wormtail stuttered and he steeled himself for a round of pain.

"Crucio." Shrieks of pain rang out in the Malfoy manor and was immediately silenced.

Dark Lord Voldemort, known as Tom Marvolo Riddle, You-Know-Who, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, award winner of special services to Hogwarts, Slytherin's heir etc, sat on his throne in the Malfoy's manor.

Lord Voldemort was having a very bad day indeed. To say that he was not happy was a complete understatement. He had already handed out crucios to Wormtail for delivering more bad news to him. Why he kept the traitorous rat as a Death Eater was a complete mystery to him, since he was of no use to the Lord.

Two years had passed ever since the damned prophecy was made and Wormtail still hadn't managed to break the fidelus charm. For two years, Voldemort was plotting the downfall of the Potters, especially the twins. Severus Snape had given him his full account of the prophecy, yet Voldemort had no idea knowing which twin it was that had power matching his own. Neither did the rest of the wizarding world, it seemed, except for Albus Dumbledore.

Rumors had flown around saying it was the elder brother, Joshua Potter.

'But no matter', Voldemort thought smugly. 'None of the Potters deserve to live.' He would kill both the Potter brats for a good measure.

"My... my Lord?" Bellatrix Lestrange's voice cut through into Voldemort's thoughts. "The rat is outliving its usefulness, I say, we deal with him."

Any other Death Eater who dared to speak out of turn would have been joining Wormtail in his spasm, but Bellatrix was no mere Death Eater. She was the Dark Lord's favourite, one who was hardly ever punished.

Voldemort cast a lazy eye at sniveling rat at his feet, muttering apologies for his incompetence while shaking with the after effects of the cruciarctus curse and sneered.

"Bella, Bella, I think the rat here has indeed outlived its usefulness, don't you think?" Voldemort turned towards Wormtail while he gave a cry and backed away.

Voldemort raised his wand as his lips formed the words.

"Avada Kedavra," the light left Voldemort's wand but was deflected when suddenly Crack! A resounding crack rang through the room and a puff of smoke engulfed the spot where Wormtail was a second ago.

Harry stood in the middle of the room in a puff of smoke surrounding him and coughed, emerging from it to face a pair of crimson eyes.

"Voldemort?" he said stupidly.

"You insolent brat, you dare speak of his name? Crucio!" Bellatrix snarled as she slashed her wand down on Harry who fell onto the ground convulsing wildly and screams immediately left him, echoing around the room.

"Enough."

The pain evaporated as quickly as it came although the after effects of the curse still lingered and Harry sat up straight, panting as he looked into Voldemort's eyes, regret and fear evident on his young face.

"How did you get in?" Voldemort demanded, rising from his chair and striding down towards Harry. "How did you get into the manor?"

Harry blinked at him, confused. "I apparated," he said, sounding as though it was the most common thing in the world.

"I meant, how did you get pass the wards?" Voldemort's irritated voice asked coldly as he pointed his wand at Harry's head.

"I... I just thought really hard on finding Voldemort and I appeared here... Did I do something wrong?" Harry asked in a soft voice and flinched away.

Bellatrix gaped at him. How did a young boy manage to apparate for God's sake? Worse of, he was in perfect condition, not splinched, not in the least bit hurt. And he had managed to get pass all of Lord Voldemort's anti-apparition wards!

Lord Voldemort gazed intently at Harry just as Wormtail came around after fainting from the cruciarcus curse.

What he saw nearly made him faint again.

"Harry!" he gasped at the boy in front of him. "How did you... were you attacked? Was James and Lily...? Why are you..."

"Uncle Wormtail!" Harry gave a cry of relief and darted forward to hug Wormtail. Harry had never been very close to Wormtail but in this foreign place with a mad woman causing him pain, Harry felt beyond relief to see someone he recognized.

"Harry... Potter," Voldemort's voice said suddenly as he stared at Harry, realization dawning on his face as he finally understood the prophecy. The world was a fool, he thought smugly. Albus Dumbledore was a fool.

"Legimens," Voldemort said calmly as he pointed his wand at Harry.

Shards of Harry's memory came pouring into Voldemort's mind... Harry was four and he was watching enviously as James bought Joshua a toy broomstick, watching as James led Joshua to the Quidditch pitch with his arm's around Joshua's neck while Harry stayed in the hall, helping his mother prepare for the arrival of the Weasleys... Harry was five, it was Joshua and his birthday and he watched as the Longbottoms and their child Neville arrived... Neville

thrust a gift wrapped box into Joshua's hands the moment he stepped in and the two boys started talking and laughing... Harry watched them unwrapping Joshua's present just as Lily spotted him spying on them and ushered him away... "Go up to your room Harry... we will call you when the guests have gone... this party is for Joshua's, your party will be tomorrow..." But Harry's party never came...

"Stop! Stop it!" Harry screamed as he remembered his fifth year birthday, he felt as though he was an orphan, unloved, casted aside, never existing in his parent's eyes. Harry hurled Voldemort out of his mind as he shook and trembled, crumpling on the ground, crying.

This wasn't what Harry had expected, he wanted to be cared for, to be hide from the Potters by siding with Voldemort, not being crucioed upon and having memories tearing out from his head that made him have a splitting headache.

Voldemort gazed intently on Harry for a moment. How on earth had the boy managed to throw him, the dark lord, master of legimency out of his head?

"My Lord?" Bellatrix asked, pointing her wand at the Harry. "What should we do with the Potter?"

Voldemort raised a hand and halted her before turning to Harry who was trembling on the floor.

"Was that your first time apparating?" he asked, confirming his suspicions... the chosen one... one of the twins was the chosen one... neither would live while the other survives...

Harry looked up guiltily and hung his head. "No..." he said softly, fear in his eyes. "I could do it since last year if I really wanted to... but mum told me not to 'show off to Joshua'..."

"And your reason for barging into my manor at this hour is...?"

Harry's emerald eyes met Voldemort's crimson ones. It was now or never, Harry decided. He had already made up his mind.

"I wanted to run away from home and this was the only place that would not turn me back to them. They don't want me there, I know it," Harry's voice became sad again as his eyes started turning misty.

"Interesting..." Lord Voldemort murmured to himself while Bellatrix leapt forward, eager to hear his verdict. Wormtail stared at Harry in disbelief, as though seeing the other Potter kid for the first time.

Lord Voldemort stared at the boy before him just as he hissed something in parseltongue to Nagini.

/Come Nagini, I seek your opinion in a matter.../

A door opened to Harry's left and he was startled to see a great snake slithering across the manor towards Voldemort. This must be the snake that everyone was feared from. Voldemort's familiar, a rare and poisonous snake.

/You called, master?/

/There is a Potter in front of me. I am considering to accept him as my heir. He has a distinct magical aura around him at such a young age. He would grow to be a powerful wizard one day, I'm sure of it. What is your name again, Potter?/ Voldemort asked, forgetting for a moment that Harry didn't speak Parseltongue.

But he was shocked when young Harry hissed back /Harry/ without realizing that he wasn't speaking in English. Bellatrix and Wormtail looked at Harry in shock.

/He speaks?/ Voldemort lost his cool posture for a second as surprise washed over him.

Nagini slithered towards Harry who stood his ground, wary, but not backing away.

/Is your name Harry, young one?/

/Yes, who are you? Why can I speak to you?/

/I'm Nagini, young Harry. Amazing, truly amazing to meet another speaker at last. You can speak to me because you speak parseltongue, in short, you are a parselmouth./

/Impossible... no one in my family can speak to snakes!/

/It is possible, young child, for a powerful wizard to speak parseltongue even if it wasn't in their blood. You my child, am a great wizard destined for great things.../ Nagini turned towards Voldemort and seemed to nod. /You should accept him as your heir, this child is like no other. I approve of him.../

Harry's heart gave a leap as Nagini slithered away.

"You would accept me?" he asked, switching back to English now that Nagini was gone.

Voldemort surveyed Harry with his eyes.

"That will depend. Will you not regret if I were to let you stay? You would stay as my adopted heir, never to be a Potter ever again in your life. Will you regret it, being cut off from your family?"

"I will not," Harry said without hesitating.

"Will you be loyal to me forever, to the Dark? Never to betray me?"

Harry said calmly, "I will never betray you," in such a voice that no one doubted it. Harry was young, but he was mature for his age.

"And if the time comes, will you be able to turn from your family, killing them if need be?"

Harry closed his eyes before he whispered, "They aren't my family, they never wanted me and now, I don't want to be a Potter either."

"And will you?"

Harry hesitated for a fraction of a second before he raised his head and looked at Voldemort in the eye.

"I will."

Silence met Harry's words. Bellatrix gasped, unable to believe what she was hearing. What on earth had saint Lily and James Potter done to their kid that made him so full of hatred and sadness

towards them? No child of Harry's age she had come across was so matured, so magically powerful. Such a child shouldn't have been possible, apparation at five years old was not something even the Dark Lord had done. Harry was an asset to the wizarding world, his powers alone would rival Dumbledore or Voldemort's when he came of age. The Light was a fool not to have realized it. It was obvious as to who was the Chosen One. Not the brat Joshua, no, it was Harry.

Albus Dumbledore had made a grave mistake by having Lily and James neglect the child. He had chosen the wrong Potter as the chosen one. And the world foolishly believed him.

"Then you are welcomed as my heir," Voldemort said softly.

Harry James Potter, now Riddle, looked up at Voldemort, wonder in his eyes as happiness lit his face for a second. He couldn't believe it, he was free, free from the Potter's and living in his brother's shadow and under the constant reminder of his parents not to 'show off' his accidental magic to Joshua to discourage him.

Then a thought occurred to him. "What about Uncle Wormtail?" he asked, pointing at Wormtail in a corner. "Wouldn't he tell the Potters?" Harry spoke as though he was determined never to address Lily or James as his parents ever.

Bellatrix looked ecstatic. 'Now that's what I call a real prodigy,' she thought with grudging respect as a green light shot from Voldemort's wand, killing Wormtail in a mere second before he had a chance to react.

Harry did not flinch. He accepted it as a need, he couldn't have any one related to the Order knowing about what transpired within the Malfoy Manor's room tonight, even if the party was a spy or a traitor. It was too much of a risk.

"Not a word Bella, to anybody. Come Harry, it's time you paid a visit to your new home," Voldemort smiled for the first time in three decades.

The light had made a grave mistake indeed.

The world would never know what hit it.

Somewhere in the Department of Mysteries, Hall of Prophecies, a sphere exploded into nothingness, leaving an echoing silence behind.

Author's Notes

First Chapter done! Reviews are appreciated, thoughts, opinions and constructive comments on how to improve the story are welcomed. In fact, it would be best if you gave me comments on how to improve my writing or story plot!

Another thing is that im considering if I should send Harry to Hogwarts or Durmstrang. If I were to send him to Durmstrang, he would most probably go back to Hogwarts during the Triwizard tournament. The changes would not matter that much, it would just adversely affect Harry's character in the story but a little bit. So tell me which school you want to send Harry to when you review!

Thanks and Rate and Review!

2. The Daily Prophet and the Stranger

Harry formerly Potter opened his eyes as he stared at his surroundings around him. For a moment, he was confused. Where was he, in this unfamiliar place? The room was beyond huge and he was lying on a large four poster bed with silk pillow sheets. Harry frowned. This wasn't his house, he knew it. His bedroom was small, the smallest in the family, about half the size of Joshua's.

Then Harry remembered. He blinked. Had he really went to see Voldemort? He was free from being his brother's shadow, he realized with a rush of exhilaration. Gone were the days where he was forced to lie low and watch himself, forever hiding in the shadow. Harry grinned childishly as he jumped on his bed happily, celebrating his new found freedom.

Suddenly, the door opened with a loud bang as Bellatrix strolled into the room, the scowl on her face disappearing as she saw Harry jumping on the bed, innocence so pure on his face with happiness so wild that she felt was amused by it.

"Harry...?" she said loudly, and Harry stopped jumping for a moment, looking at Bellatrix with a shifty grin.

"Auntie Bella?" Harry asked shyly.

Bellatrix was stunned. Harry was really a child like no other, she thought. She knew that he had grown up with the Potters, and must have been fed with the stories by Sirius Black her no-good-traitor-cousin about her and her wonderful life of torturing mudbloods and muggles, yet here he was, addressing her like his aunt.

"The Dark Lord requires your presence in the dining room, immediately," Bellatrix said and Harry immediately leapt off the bed, landing in a sprawl on the floor at Bellatrix's feet in his haste. He looked up and smiled sheepishly at Auntie Bella.

A smile twitched from Bellatrix's lips as she looked at Harry. Harry was an endearing child, he was just unlucky to be cast aside being the brother of the 'Chosen One'. In any other family, she knew he would be cared for immensely. Bellatrix extended one hand towards Harry and he took it gratefully, walking along side her as she brought him to the Dining Room. The Malfoy Manor was huge, Harry

realized as he walked past portraits after portraits of the ancestors of the Malfoy family. The furnishings were elegant and decorated with a woman's touch, basically screaming with the words "filthy rich pureblood family".

Finally, Bellatrix turned from the end of a corridor and exited to a large room which Harry immediately recognized as the Dining Room. To say it was a dining room was an understatement. The room was more of a dining saloon, he realized. Was it really possible that only the three Malfoys lived in the Malfoy manor? Hell, it could probably fit in the whole of Hogwarts!

The Dark Lord sat at the head of the elegant stone table with the Daily Prophet in his hands, seemingly absorbed in reading the Prophet. Harry chuckled softly but the Dark Lord heard him, raising his head slowly to look up at him.

"Sorry..." Harry said with a grin. "It's just funny to see the most feared Dark Lord of all times reading the Daily Prophet," Harry ended off with a smirk and Voldemort looked at him in surprise.

"Harry! How could you speak to the Dark Lord in this tone?" Bellatrix asked, shocked at his imprudence and his guts to be so informal towards the Dark Lord and looked at her Lord fearfully, awaiting for the Crucio to hit Harry.

But it never came as Voldemort merely beckoned Harry over to the seat beside him and Harry ran over, surprising the Dark Lord as he hugged him.

"Thanks for letting me stay here," Harry said genuinely with a smile as he looked up at the Dark Lord who was looked awkward at the physical contact and was attempting to prise Harry's fingers off him.

The Dark Lord hesitated as he stared at the child using every ounce of skill at Occulmency he possessed to prevent himself from smiling back at the child. Really, Harry's smile was infectious, how could it affect the Dark Lord for Merlin's sake?

"You're welcome," Voldemort said stiffly while Bellatrix watched the two in bemusement. No wonder the Dark Lord preferred to keep Harry's existence as a secret, she thought. He would lose the respect he commanded should anyone see him in this position.

"There's something you need to see," Voldemort continued as he passed the Daily Prophet into Harry's hands.

Harry blinked, looking down on the Prophet to see his brother's face glaring up at him from the newspaper with his parents on either side of him. Lily was frowning, she looked sad to anyone who didn't know her, but Harry knew that she wasn't sad, she was upset at Harry.

"Brother of the Chosen One Missing!" the headlines seemed to screamed at him.

Funny how his brother's photo was on the Prophet when he was the one missing, Harry thought, disgruntled, as he read the paper in silence.

Back at Diagon Alley, Remus Lupin apparated to the Potter manor the moment his hands landed on the Prophet in the morning. He was sitting alone in his flat at Diagon Alley, with a cup of tea in his hands when the owl flew in through the window and dropped the paper into his toast.

He sighed. It seemed that owls never seemed to learn not to drop their mail onto food.

Remus cast a lazy glance at the Prophet and promptly choked on his tea, spraying tea on the Prophet in his shock. Hastily, he pulled out his wand and muttered "Terego" before reading the paper in a hurry, anger fuelling him with each passing word.

'James and Lily!' He thought angrily after he was done with the paper, glaring down at their photo in the Prophet in fury. They had really gone too far this time. In his absence, he wondered what things Lily and James had done to young Harry to result in this.

With a growl, Remus got up from his seat and apparated to the Potter Manor, the Prophet clutched in his hands. He threw open the Potter's door without much of a knock and greeting and slammed the Prophet onto the table where Joshua was, reading his copy of the Daily Prophet with a smug smile.

"Remus?" Lily smiled as she greeted her friend in between feeding Joshua with bits of bacon from her fork lovingly while he waved his

hands, demanding for more like a spoilt prince, which reminded Remus immensely of Dudley Dursely when he had the unfortunate luck to meet him three years ago.

"What's with this Lily?" Remus jabbed the prophet angrily, not bothering to return Lily's greeting. Lily's smile turned to a frown. "How could you let him go missing and sit here so unconcerned over him? Shouldn't you be out there searching for Harry?"

Lily frowned as she took a glance at the Prophet in her son's hands.

Brother of the Chosen One Missing!

By Rita Skeeter

Harry James Potter, brother of Hero Joshua Damien Potter was reported missing from the Potter Manor yesterday when the Potters were having the birthday party of the famous Potters. It was around night time when Harry was reported to be missing from his bedroom.

Said mother of Joshua Potter the Chosen One and Harry Potter, Lily Elizabeth Evans, "James and I had no idea whatsoever that Harry was missing. We knew that Harry was upset earlier on the day at his brother for grabbing all the attention and standing in the spot light and he made a fuss, staying in the bedroom, refusing to come down to greet the guests..."

James Potter, the Head of Aurors in the Ministry of Magic, added, "Harry had always been in envy of his brother, I guess," he said with a frown. "We can't dismiss the possibility that he had run away from home... we just hope that he is fine and would come back ... Being the brother of the Chosen One, he should have been more mature than that, I suppose... The aurors are already trying to find Harry and we hope that he comes back safe and sound, though we would have a word with him about his responsibility... Of course, You-Know-Who or his followers might have kidnapped Harry, but Lily and I hardly believe it is so," he cast a glance at Joshua beside him and ruffled his hair, explaining proudly, "It is widely known that Joshua is the Chosen One, and hence we believe that You-Know-Who would target him not Harry... and this is a case of... of... children's antics..."

Sirius Black, godfather of Joshua and Harry Potter, laughed off this incident when your Daily Prophet reporter here questioned him. Like James Potter, Sirius Black believed that this was a case of run away and not of major importance. "Of course, Harry might be in danger of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, but being the brother of the Chosen One, Harry can't be that weak magically..."

A team of Aurors have been working around the clock in search of Harry James Potter, but no news have been found as of yet. As to how young Mr. Potter had managed to disappear right under the nose of his parents, brothers, godfather and guests, it is still being investigated. Also, investigation so far has shown that there was a break in the wards around Harry's bedroom, but such breaks can only be the result of Apparation which young Mr. Potter could not have achieved successfully at his tender age.

Joshua Potter, the "Chosen One", declined comment on this matter but just said one sentence, "I have always known that Harry has always been jealous at me and all, being the chosen one, but I don't think that he should come up with this sort of antics to grab the attention of people..."

For more information about Joshua Potter as the Chosen One, please turn to pages 5 and 6.

"I don't see a problem with it Remus," Lily said bluntly as she looked up from the paper. "It's good to see that Joshua is being mentioned as the Chosen One. Harry really shouldn't have done that."

Remus stared at Lily, aghast. "Lily... your son is missing and all you care about is the attention Joshua is missing?" he pointed at Joshua who was still eating without a care in the world. "And what's this rubbish about Harry making a fuss? Harry's mature enough not to do that... Lily, he is your son!"

"Remus, that's enough!" James said loudly as he walked into the living room. "We both know that this isn't the work of You-Know-Who! Harry should have been more mature than to come up with this type of things to grab our attention!"

Remus looked at James as though seeing him for the first time as he finally spat, "James Potter, this is your son we are discussing about, not a stranger. Harry might not be the Chosen One, but he is

still your son, and my godson! How could you act as though nothing had happened? If Harry is captured by You-Know-Who, he could be killed and tortured!"

James stared at his friend in undisguised shock. Never had Remus shouted at him in all these years that they were friends. He must have been closer to Harry than he initially thought. James shook his head and tried to reason with Remus that Harry wasn't important, it was Joshua who deserved the attention and care of his parents. The fate of the wizarding world lay within Joshua's hands, not Harry.

But Lily cut in and said what he was thinking. "Remus, I know you care about Harry, but isn't this better? Harry would never have to live in his brother's shadow anymore!"

Remus shook his head in disgust as he looked at James and Lily before he turned on his heel and walked away, slamming the door behind him, ignoring the cries of James to stop.

Remus walked silently away, unable to believe what he had just heard. What on earth had James and Lily done? They weren't the kind people he knew from before... Impossible, one prophecy had changed their characters by so much ... Impossible, how could it be?

With one last glance at the Potter Manor, Remus apparated away, his heart sinking as he thought of poor Harry.

Harry folded the Prophet and gave it back to Voldemort who looked at him questioningly, for some form of a response to the article about him.

Harry shrugged. "It doesn't really matter anyway," he concluded to Voldemort after a long while of silence, trying to brush away the hurt he felt at his parent's words. "In a few years to come they will know what Joshua really is like."

Voldemort nodded thoughtfully as he turned back to Harry again.

"Harry, if you were to be my heir, you would have to be blood adopted by me and take on my appearance. Are you okay with that?" he asked.

Harry nodded quickly. "Anything, I don't want to look like the Potters a single bit."

Voldemort smiled. "I'm afraid you would be disappointed. While the Blood Ritual will mean that you can take on my appearance, unfortunately, you will still retain some of your parents appearance, but it would be less obvious."

Harry's eyes flickered with emotion. Was it relief that some part of him was a Potter? But no matter, Voldemort knew that he would be able to mold Harry into his perfect, cold, ruthless heir with the years to come.

Harry nodded then looked at Bellatrix before saying, "What would I be doing at the Manor? It's kind of boring here isn't it?"

Voldemort laughed loudly. "Of course. You would be learning how to master your powers here. Bellatrix here can teach you the Dark Arts and I'm sure Lucius won't mind teaching you about Defensive spells as well as charms, transfiguration, all the things you need to know as my heir."

Harry grinned at the prospect of learning more about spells. Since young, he had been an avid reader of both Light and Dark magic, but he found the Dark Magic fascinating. He sneaked into the Potter Library at the dead hour of the night, flipping through old books after books to read more about spells and trying out some of those himself. Since he didn't own a wand, he quickly learned how to adapt and try using wandless magic, and to his surprise, found that he could use wandless magic for some types of spells like the Levitation Charm quite easily.

However, all this late night studying stopped one day when Lily caught him. How could Harry ever forgot the humiliation he felt that night? All Harry wanted was to read, to study, but Lily always thought that he was trying to surpass Joshua.

It wasn't his fault that Joshua had not shown much accidental magic at his age, wasn't it? But apparently, it resulted in the constant reminders from Lily...

"Harry, what are you doing here at night?" Lily's voice was sharp as she flicked on the light in the Potter Library to see Harry bending over a huge dusty book.

Harry's head spun around as he faced his mother and quickly closed the book.

"Mum?" he said timidly, waiting for the scolding that would surely come.

Lily crossed the room in three strides and slapped him across the face before bending down and looking at Harry straight in the eye.

"Harry, why are you trying so hard to be better than Joshua?" Lily's voice was cold and hard, as were her eyes, missing the normal twinkle in them when she faced Joshua. "You would never be as good as Joshua," she continued harshly, "so I suggest that you stop trying to win over Joshua. As the brother of the Chosen One, you should be there to help him and support him, not try to steal his glory!"

Harry blinked. "But... But..." he stammered before hanging his head down. "Yes mummy..." he said softly.

Lily nodded in approval. "This will not happen again, will it, Harry?"

Harry nodded, unable to say anything else. All he could think of was why had his mother forbidden him to read in the library? It wasn't as though he was harming anybody, unlike Joshua, who's favourite past time was to goad and laugh at Harry...

"Harry?" Bellatrix voice cut into Harry's thought. "Answer the Dark Lord."

Harry turned towards Voldemort and said, "When could we start the lessons? Could we start as early as possible?"

Voldemort looked at Harry in approval and said, "You remind me a lot of myself in my younger days, thirsting for knowledge and eager to learn as much as you can about the magical things you could do with a wand! But Harry, I have to disappoint you again. Your lessons can only start after we complete the Blood Ritual. Of course, you are

too young for a wand to choose you now, so you will have to use a spare."

Harry nodded glumly but brightened up as Voldemort continued, "Meanwhile, you can go to the Malfoy Library for a bit of reading. But remember, before the Blood Ritual is completed, never reveal your identity to anybody for your safety."

"Thank you and yes, father!" Harry said happily, ignoring the surprised looks on Voldemort and Bellatrix's faces when he called Voldemort 'father' and gave Voldemort another hug before running out of the room in search of the library.

Bellatrix turned towards the Dark Lord as Harry raced out of the room, puzzled. "Does he know where the library is?"

Voldemort smirked, taking his time to answer her.

"I dare say he will find it... in an hour or two."

Harry was lost and tired. He had been running around the Malfoy Manor for the past hour or so, yet he couldn't find the library. In his sheer excitement, he had completely forgotten that he had no idea where the Malfoy Library is.

Exhausted and completely lost, he had been walking back to the same room for three times and was giving up hope of ever finding the library when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

Harry turned, relieved to find a person, but came face to face with a boy around his age with platinum blond hair staring at him in curiosity.

"Who are you? What are you doing in my manor? I don't think I've ever seen you here before," the boy said rudely.

Harry hesitated for a second.

"I... I'm... the Dark Lord's guest," he said truthfully.

Surprise flittered across the young boy's face. "Were you looking for something then?" he asked, his voice polite now. "I can help you

with it. I'm Draco, Draco Malfoy," he extended a hand towards Harry who shook it.

"The Library, do you have any idea where the library is?" Harry asked.

Draco looked at Harry like he was from another planet. "Why do you want to go to the library for, at your age?"

Now Harry was on the defensive. "Aunt Bella allowed me to do some reading in the library," Harry retorted. "So are you going to tell me where the library is, Malfoy?"

Draco smirked. Ahh, here at last was someone his age that was not a dunderhead like Crabbe or Goyle, or worse, Pansy who shrieked with laughter whenever she saw him. "Straight there, then turn left," he pointed. "I wasn't aware that Aunt Bella had another... never mind, I've got a feeling I would see you soon anyway. What's your name?" he asked.

Harry smiled mysteriously. He knew better than to say that he wasn't allowed to disclose his real name. What name would be safe? He certainly couldn't use Potter. He would be kicked out of the manor in no time, and he shuddered to think of the number of crucios he would receive. "Harry... Harry ... Lestrangle," he invented wildly, using Bellatrix's marriage name.

Draco nodded at his last name in approval. "Wasn't aware that the Lestranges had a son ..." he said thoughtfully then smirked. "I'll see you soon Harry," and he walked away to the opposite direction.

Harry smiled to himself. Now he was going to the library at last.

Author's Notes

Another chapter done! Please Rate and Review! Comments appreciated for improvement!

Important: Please vote at my profile whether you want Harry to go to Durmstrang, Hogwarts or another Foreign School which will be similar to Durmstrang, but with certain changes which you can specify if you want to. If not, you can also leave your review and also include the school of your choice while reviewing and I can tally up

the votes! Thanks, the school Harry goes to are decided by my readers!

Thanks everyone who reviewed! Thanks ! And special thanks to 13AkiraKuranXIII for being my first reviewer of this fanfiction!

3. The Ritual

The Malfoy Library truly lived up to Harry's expectation. Even in his six year old mind, he had come to accept that the Malfoys simply had the best of everything. The Library was huge, but what fascinated Harry (which contributed to him staying at the library overnights for several days on the end until Bella forcibly restricted him to certain hours in the library) were the books that it contained.

Abstract books on potions, transfiguration, charms, defense, and what intrigued Harry most was the Dark Arts. Having lived under the constant reminder by his parents and no less, Dumbledore and his Order, Harry often felt that never once would he use Dark Arts, yet now, he wasn't that sure of it.

Dark Arts wasn't that dark, Harry felt. There were some books with explicit information about curses that were high up the illegal scale of the Ministry but nevertheless, it didn't hurt knowing about the curses when you saw one.

And then Harry came across the Unforgivables.

Reading about the Unforgivables seemed to fuel Harry in his research as to how to defend oneself against them. Yes, he knew for a fact that it cannot be stopped by any shield charms, but surely, wouldn't it be an advantage if one came up with a way to protect themselves against it? And hence, at the tender age of six, Harry started his intensive research on defending the Unforgivables.

It continued until late one April afternoon, three months since he disowned himself from the Potter family, Harry sat in a corner of the library pouring over various book intensely.

In one hand, he held a Latin translation of curses and shield charms, since most spells were created in Latin, in the other, a quill hung loosely. Frowning, Harry looked at the paper and back at the translation of defending against the Unforgivables.

'Contego... Contego... to shield... to shield...'

Harry knew he was missing something. Contego was an effective shield charm, he had tested it out, yet it couldn't match the power of

the Unforgivables. Perhaps something was wrong... What could it be? 'To shield, to shield against the Unforgivables,' Harry thought. 'What could be wrong? But wait'- What if, what if, Harry realized with a rush of exhilaration, as an idea formed within him. What if the Unforgivables couldn't be shield from, but absorbed?

That would make sense, Harry's mind fast forwarded to all the possible absorption charms he could think off... He once asked Voldemort about shielding oneself from the Unforgivables, yet, he had forgotten about the Absorption of the Unforgivables. Was it possible? He had never come across any research done by famous wizards and witches attempting to absorb an Unforgivable, it was all focused on the shielding...

Then Harry's heart sank. How would he be able to find an absorption charm powerful enough to face the Unforgivables? No doubt, only a powerful wizard or witch would be able to cast it, and Harry was only six despite him being powerful for his age...

Harry stared lost in thought at a portrait of a man resembling the boy Draco he met 2 months ago. Since then, Harry hadn't seen him since... It would have been nice to have some company other than a irritable Dark Lord and overly concerned Death Eater hovering around him... He was dozing off... the afternoon heat was overwhelming... how he wished he could sleep... yet he needed to finish his research... he needed... he needed... His head was dropping... he was falling, falling asleep...

"Harry?"

A familiar voice broke into Harry's near slumber as his head jerked off his hands and fell onto the table. Harry whirled around, sleepily as he vaguely recognized the figure in front of him.

"Aunt Bella...?" he murmured, half asleep.

"Harry!" Bellatrix chided, disapproval coloring her voice, but it was ruined somewhat by the fact of her unexplained enthusiasm. "It's ready. The potion is ready! The Blood Ritual can begin immediately!" Bellatrix said, her eagerness poorly disguised in her excitement.

"Wh... What?" Harry blinked before he absorbed Bellatrix's words. It was ready! After two months of waiting for the potion to be

completed, it was ready at last. Harry's mind only had one thought registered to him: the training was going to start. Voldemort had insisted that Harry not be introduced to the Inner Circle of Death Eaters before the ritual was completed. That way, no one would suspect Harry's former heritage.

Thinking back, Harry could still remember the argument he had with the Dark Lord over it. He, in his thirst for knowledge, had been very reluctant to wait for two months before his lessons began and finally, ended up smashing the windows in the Malfoy Manor in his rage when he finally accepted that he was on the losing end of the argument. Bella had thought that it was accidental magic, but the Dark Lord and Harry knew better.

It was magic, wandless and non verbal magic, intentional as every other magic Harry had performed.

"The Blood Ritual, Harry!" Bellatrix repeated, dragging Harry out of his chair as he quickly closed his book before allowing himself to be dragged away, as Bella jabbered on and on about the things he could do the moment he was officially Voldemort's heir.

"Aunt Bella," Harry said suddenly, not following Bellatrix's words at all, "Is it possible to absorb an Unforgivable?"

Bellatrix stared down at the boy, her mouth widening into a comical O, surprise flitting across her face. She opened her mouth to say the affirmed but halfway through, she stopped as her mind registered what Harry had said.

"Ab-absorb an Unforgivable?" she said, her voice hushed.

"Yes... I was thinking if it was possible since no one has tried it yet, mostly people try shielding it... and hardly anyone bothers researching about it now... Most people have given up on it..." Harry explained slowly, his eyes watching Bellatrix's face for a change in expression.

"Yes... yes... I think, maybe we should better speak to the Dark Lord about this," she said and Harry's face lit up in excitement. Speak to the Dark Lord? That meant that there was a definite chance!

Harry almost skipped all the way to the dungeons in the Malfoy Manor after hearing Bellatrix's opinion, while Bellatrix walked next to him, her face slightly dazed with awe.

Voldemort looked up from the dungeons as the door to it swung open and in walked in a beaming Harry and a slightly disorientated Bellatrix.

"Bella, Bella," Voldemort said in a tone that meant as sarcasm. "Are you so excited about Harry becoming my heir that you went dazed? I always knew your stay in the Azkaban did you no good... However, as it is, I have no use for a - ah - insane follower."

Harry smirked at Bellatrix who still looked dazed.

"My.. my lord?" Bellatrix said as she came out of her reverie, before she absorbed the impact of the Dark Lord's words. "No, my Lord, no," she hurriedly said, throwing a glare at Harry, "It's just that Harry has came up with an idea against the Unforgivables, and I think that it could be —"

"Against the Unforgivables, you said...?" Voldemort interrupted and gazed intently down on Harry, as though seeing him for the first time. "Explain," he said after a moment.

Harry glanced at Bellatrix before saying, "I was thinking, if the Unforgivables couldn't be shield from, but could be absorbed from? No one has tried absorbing it yet... It might be possible... after all, since absorption charms are of a higher level than shield charms and only certain powerful wizards can do it successfully..."

"Absorbing it? Hmm..." the Dark Lord looked thoughtful for a moment before he said, "We will discuss that later Bellatrix, for now, we can start with the ritual. As you can see, Lucius has consented to be our Bonder," he gestured lazily to a blond wizard at the corner of the room which Harry and Bellatrix had not noticed earlier on.

"M'Lord," Lucius gave a deep bow as he stepped forward, his eyes flickering towards Harry in curiosity.

"As you might have known by now Harry," the Dark Lord continued, "Lucius knows of your identity, but he will not ever disclose it, will you now, Lucius?" Harry could not help noticing how the Dark Lord's

voice suddenly became dangerously soft and was awed at the power in it. Voldemort absolutely reeked of power, to anyone who could have a bit of sense in them.

"No, my Lord," Lucius assured in his silky voice, bowing again. "Shall we... shall we start the Bonding then?" He looked nervous at the prospect of the Dark Lord gaining an heir. Lucius could feel the auras of wizards, an ability which the Dark Lord shared. It was precisely this reason why Lucius had joined him; he had felt the power from the Dark Lord rolling in waves around him.

Even now, when the Dark Lord controlled the amount of power he allowed to be felt, Lucius could still feel the depth of it, like a trench in the ocean, never ending...

And Harry, that boy itself was a wonder. Even before Harry had walked in, Lucius could feel a strong magical aura seeping through the doorway. It was choking almost, no doubt if the boy had an aura at six, he shuddered to think how powerful he would be when he came of age.

Perhaps, more powerful than the Lord himself. It would do Lucius good to gain the boy's trust, no doubt...

"Harry, over here," the Dark Lord gestured Harry over to the middle of the room.

There was a rune circle with odd symbols which encircled the center of the room with a cauldron perched on a table in the middle. It was smoking, giving off fumes in thick billowing clouds of smoke, and the liquid inside was pitch black.

"In here, Harry," the Dark Lord repeated, as Harry stared curiously at the cauldron. "As you would probably have known from your many nights of research in the library," he threw a dark look at Lucius as though it was his fault for owning such an extensive library, "the Blood Ritual would bind the both of us magically. Should any one of us want to break the bond, it may be done so with the consent of the other party. In addition," the Dark Lord paused, before continuing, "both parties would receive the strongest gift of the other party."

Harry's eyes widened. He hadn't come across this bit of information from the Book Sacred Rituals of the Dark. What gift would he receive from the Dark Lord...? He was a parselmouth already, so that was one gift out.

"Your gift, I suspect, would be the ability to read auras which, would allow you to be a master at occulmency and legimency. The gifts are interconnected, which is why you would become an automated master of the two abilities several wizards are unable to achieve.

As for the powers I would receive from you, it would not manifest as early and would only make itself known when you have discovered your abilities," Voldemort continued, sounding impassive as to see what ability he would inherit from Harry.

"And now, let us begin the Bonding," Lucius said when the Dark Lord was done.

Harry and Voldemort took a step towards each other, and both were facing the other at opposite ends of the cauldron with Lucius next to the both of them. Bellatrix hung around at the shadows, watching them intently.

Lucius raised his wand before pointing it at the potion within the cauldron, "Sino duos populus superstes pre hic futurus vinculum ut abbas quod filius, agnitio per veneficus universitas ut veneficus vinculum , nunquam futurus infractus nisi consentio est sumo."

More smoke rose from within the potion as it filled the now steamy room. Lucius hesitated, before turning towards the Dark Lord, an apologetic look at his face as he wordlessly asked Voldemort for permission to do something.

Voldemort raised a deathly pale palm to Lucius's who muttered "incidere" and a cut formed on Voldemort's hands, as a drop of blood splashed onto the cauldron below. Green light blazed around the room as the blood touched the potion and was swallowed within the mass of black water.

Lucius now turned towards Harry and did the same slashing movement on Harry's palm which he held out on cue. Like before, the potion blazed green as it flashed around the room, Harry watched curiously, itching to examine the potion.

Lucius took a deep breath and turned to look at Voldemort once more. The Dark Lord slowly lowered his head, his final cue. Harry watched, slightly annoyed as Lucius turned back once more to the potion, without consulting his opinion like he did the Dark Lord's.

"Permissum nos iam vinculum is duos animus pro vita."

The potion bubbled once more, and glowed before it stopped. Almost simultaneously, Voldemort and Harry doubled over in pain as sharp pain shot through them, tearing through their minds, their bodies, their souls apart as the potion was completed, binding the two souls together as magical heirs.

Harry lay on the floor, gasping for breath, as he shut his eyes with all his might, trying hard to not think of the pain within him. Across him, he vaguely realized that Voldemort was also bent over in pain, yet he still maintained his posture and looked moderately dangerous enough for Bellatrix not to erupt in laughter. Lucius composed a perfectly calm mask at the sight of his Lord bending over in pain which went on for a few minutes.

Finally, Harry groaned as he straightened out. The entire process had taken the most out of him and he suddenly realized that the room seemed overly... bright? No, bright wasn't that word, Harry decided. It was Voldemort, that man now felt as though he was a light himself, drawing attention to those around him.

Harry could almost feel and taste the raw dark power that encircled the Dark Lord in a swirling mist. It was like a temptation, tempting him to fall prey to the darkness of the power, like so many people had done before. So that was what Voldemort meant about sensing auras. Curious, Harry turned almost reluctantly from the alluring dark power of Voldemort and turned towards Lucius, who also had an aura, but which was less visible and alluring than Voldemort's.

"I can feel your power," Harry said, almost stupidly and Voldemort chuckled.

"Harry, what about me, can you feel my aura?" Bellatrix said eagerly from her corner of the room with a slightly anxious look on her face. "The Lord and Lucius has never told me about my aura ever, could you...?"

Harry turned towards Bellatrix.

"You don't have an aura," Harry said solemnly.

"I don't have a what?" Bellatrix cried out in horror at Harry's words as Harry struggled to keep a straight face before a giggle escaped him.

"I was just joking, Aunt Bella. You do have an aura, but it's fainter than the Dark Lord's and probably Malfoy's as well..."

Bellatrix exhaled in relief as Harry and Voldemort stepped out from the shadows of the dungeons. Under the sole lamp of the dungeon, much could not be seen, but now that they were out and under the lamp, Bellatrix gasped as she saw Harry.

"You...you changed! You look like.. like him!" her voice was dripping with awe.

Harry looked at himself while Voldemort looked at him in bemusement. Silently, he conjured a mirror and handed it to Harry who looked almost shocked at the image in the mirror.

His appearance was now no longer as before. His hair was longer, touching his collar and he had sharp features around his face, already losing some of the rounded childishness of before. His eyes were still emerald green like Lily's and his raven hair was still messy, but overall, his appearance had noticeable changes.

His face was pale, paler than it was before and he seemed to have grown a few inches in height. He no longer needed glasses, he realized happily. Of course, how could the younger Tom Riddle be the master of seduction without perfect eye sight?

"I look like you? Is this what you looked like when you were young?" Harry asked Voldemort.

"More or less... Harrison Riddle..." Voldemort looked amused at Harry's new name. "But I had blue eyes... the number of people who fell pray under it," he smirked looking at Bellatrix who flushed red from some memory or sort.

Harry shrugged. "It beats looking like them."

He saw Voldemort turning towards Lucius to discuss about some raid or another and took it as his cue to leave, walking towards the door with a beaming Bellatrix when suddenly, Voldemort turned back to him and called.

"And Harry?"

Harry stopped and turned around. There was something funny in Voldemort's eyes. Before he could react, the Dark Lord raised a wand at him and murmured something.

Everything went black as the jet of light hit Harry.

Author's Notes

Another chapter done! It's not as long as the other chapters, but the next chapter should be longer.

As for Harry's special gift, it would be revealed soon, in the next few chapters. Comments appreciated for me to improve on the story, and thanks to everyone who gave me suggestions on how the plot would develop! I would consider to include some in, so thanks in advance, some were quite creative and I thought it fitted well with the story if I were to include it in :)

4. Diagon Alley

Bellatrix watched in horror as the boy crumpled onto the floor in front of him. She recognized the spell he had used and understood the need for it. She disapproved of it, not that she was going to say anything to her precious Dark Lord. For one, she had enough crucios to last her for a life time. For another, she was afterall, his most faithful follower, as she often bragged to others.

She watched silently as the Dark Lord nodded to Lucius who stepped forward to Harry.

"Ennervate," Lucius said in his monotonous voice.

Bellatrix saw Harry blink his eyes slowly in confusion as he took in the scene in front of him and then looked down upon himself, half sitting up from the dusty floor. Then he turned to Voldemort.

"Father?" he said questioningly.

Bellatrix didn't miss the hardening edge that crept to Harry's voice, so unlike the childish sing song voice he had just mere minutes ago. Harry's eyes seemed to have aged as well, he lost the childish innocence and naivety and there was a cold look in his face. The look Bellatrix knew that would appear on Harry's face more often. Somehow, she felt sad, missing his joyful smile. But this was necessary, she reminded herself, for Harry to act like the Dark Heir – feared by the wizarding world where all those muggle and mudblood scum would cower under his feet.

Voldemort smiled as he reached forward to pull Harry up. "The ritual was too much for you," he lied smoothly. "You fainted on the floor just as you were going out and Lucius brought you around."

Harry glanced at Voldemort then smiled – his familiar smile on his face once more. "Yes father, this ritual isn't designed for six year olds like me," humor was injected into his voice, yet it was lacking his usual joy.

Bellatrix decided that it was time she stepped in. "Harry," she interrupted, trying to sound as eager as before. "You know what this means right?"

Harry merely raised a eyebrow at Bellatrix's question. 'Such attitude like the Dark Heir should have,' Bellatrix thought, suppressing a shudder.

Bellatrix put on a smile. "Your training Harry!" she watched delighted as a genuine small lighted Harry's face.

"Really? Father?" Harry turned to Voldemort who gestured to Lucius once more.

"Lucius would be more than happy to begin your training with you tomorrow. Perhaps, under his guidance, you can further your studies on the Unforgivables and discover your magical gift soon," Voldemort said as he waved his hands, indicating that they could leave.

Bellatrix and Lucius bowed deeply and turned towards the door with Harry behind them when Voldemort called.

"Bellatrix, stay," he said coldly.

Bellatrix turned to Voldemort, a look of confusion evident on her aristocratic face. "My Lord...?" her voice trailed off in her puzzlement.

Voldemort paused as he watched Harry and Lucius exit the dungeons before discreetly performing privacy spell around the room.

"I'm sure," Voldemort said slowly, looking at Bellatrix in the eye. "You know what the spell does?"

Bellatrix gave a stiff nod, not daring to speak. She could feel Voldemort's aura emanating from him. Not that she could feel auras, but for powerful wizards like Voldemort, their auras literally seeped through the room, drawing everyone close to them. Even muggles felt their presence, or what they called charm from certain people.

"And I'm sure," Voldemort continued coldly. "That you will not inform Harrison about it? Surely, Bella, you would know the consequences should he continue with his current – ah – behavior?"

Bellatrix looked at Voldemort in the eye before looking down quickly. "Yes my Lord," she said hurriedly. "It is understandable, why such a spell has to be performed. The Dark Heir needs to have control over his emotions, the Obfirmo Joyeux spell is crucial to ensure that."

Voldemort regained his seductive smile as he said silkily, "Indeed Bellatrix, I see that you are well informed in the curse. You are my most trusted follower yet, Bellatrix, and you have not failed me and I trust it will remain in the same in future?" Bellatrix nodded quickly. "You may go," he dismissed Bellatrix with a wave of his hands.

Bellatrix gave a deep bow, and turned around, with a whirlwind of emotions following her. She was loyal to the Dark Lord, above anyone else, she knew. She sworn allegiance to him the moment she came of age and she could still remember the day where he welcomed her into the Inner Circle. Harry might be of growing importance to her, but no one, she swore, would make her loyalty to Voldemort waver.

"Never," Bellatrix hissed, her eyes hardening...

Voldemort watched his faithful servant leave, a smile on his lips. Really, how easy was it to control those sniveling followers of his? A little bit of praise and manipulations and he had their loyalty assured. Not to mention the added factor of his alluring aura.

Voldemort smirked.

Three days into the training and Harry was progressing very well, not that Lucius was about to tell the young heir because of his peacock-like pride. Harry had taken to learning the spells particularly quickly, especially for Defense and Dark Arts, which was ironic as the two subjects contradicted the other. Today, Harry was learning to attack on the offensive. Lucius wasted no time, taking pleasure in showing Harry how to conjure curses that were borderline illegal on the Ministry's books.

"And then, you turn your wand this way," Lucius demonstrated. "And say Scrisor."

Harry nodded eagerly at the cutting spell. Unlike most cutting spell, the Scrisor spell was unique in the sense that a simple Episkey could not mend the cut. The blood will not dry up and it needed to

seek professional medical help immediately and victims could die from excessive loss of blood, depending on how deep cut was which was based on the magical power of the wizard casting the spell. Another cruel way of slowly killing a person, yet most wizards like Voldemort don't bother with it and just use a simple Avada Kedavra.

"I have a question though," Harry said slowly. "Why do you never say 'shout' the incantation?"

Lucius smirked. "Malfoys never 'shout'," he said proudly like a true Malfoy. "We know only of true etiquette which is needed in the high social circle. If a Malfoy ever shouted, it would be so unbecoming of him or her," Lucius regained his pompous manner and looked arrogantly like a plutocrat.

Harry stared at Lucius's speech and he looked at him in curiosity.

"Yes, Harry?"

Harry shrugged before turning back to the realistic wizard-like dummy in which they were practicing the spell at. "Nothing, that is probably the longest speech I ever heard you make," he smirked. "Pretty protective of your four centuries of pure blood heritage, I guess?" he said casually.

Lucius eyes bulged and he was positively quivering in indignation but recovered himself instantly. "Correction, Harry," he said in a carefully controlled voice. "It is fourteen centuries of heritage worth. All the ancient pure blooded families are somewhat related with us – the Blacks, the Zabini, the Parkinsons, the Kirkes, the Lestranges, the Notts, even the Potters."

Harry choked on his own spit. "The w-what?"

Lucius fixed Harry with a swiveling glare. "The Potters, Harry. Old Harrison Potter was my aunt's second cousin once removed." He paused. "Not that it matters, it is more crucial that we continue with your training."

He gestured to the Dummy in front of Harry who smirked at the memory of his first day of training. Lucius, not knowing fully the extent of Harry's powers, underestimated him and allowed Harry to perform the severing hex on him. Normally, wizarding children would

not be able to get more than a small flash of purple light, but for Harry? It had resulted in some rather dire consequences when the hex overpowered Lucius and not only did the ends of his hair become severed – in which Lucius had been rather tempted to cast the hex back on Harry, it was his hair, his famous platinum blond hair, for Merlin's sake and Harry severed it off on his first attempt! – he flew back some ten feet and hit the wall, hard, before sliding down into a slump.

"Paranoid not?" Harry said in a mocking tone unlike one would see in the voice of a six year old and moved to the dummy.

"Scrisor."

Harry aimed his wand at the dummy's chest and watched as a large slash appeared on it, stretching from the neck to the abdomen and blood oozed out of the cut in large droplets. Harry wrinkled his nose in disgust and repeated the curse a second time, taking care to aim at the same spot.

By the sixth attempt, Harry had gotten hang of the spell and the dummy lay shredded on the floor, lopsided as its legs were severed at the fourth attempt and the head hung limply on one side. Lucius stood at one corner, glancing warily at Harry and tried not to let the pleased albeit somewhat awed look on his face show. It was a NEWT level spell, and one that not many wizards could accomplish in the first attempt after all. Lucius himself had taken three good tries to get a satisfactory result. Though, the dummy didn't prove as too much of a challenge in a duel.

"You have to remember though," Lucius said slowly. "That in a duel, the opponent isn't going to stand there and wait for your attack. Many spells would be able to protect oneself against the Scrisor but I can assure you, a simple Protego cannot do the trick."

"Not that I would have a chance to try it on anyone yet. I don't suppose you would let me try it on you, would you?" Harry glanced nonchalantly at the suddenly terrified expression on Lucius's face which was quickly masked into a perfectly composed mask.

"Not at all, Harry. It's just that I think the Dark Lord would prefer it that his followers were in perfect condition after the end of each training," Lucius said quickly.

Harry grinned his childish grin before he suddenly remembered something.

"Do you have a son called Draco?" and saw Lucius's eyes widening in surprise.

"Draco?" Lucius repeated. "How did you know him?"

Harry shrugged. "It isn't of major importance anyway. I saw him when I was lost in finding the Malfoy Library, honestly, how big is this place?" Harry groused grumpily. "Then he was down the corridor and started asking me, in a very rude tone too," Lucius's face paled considerably at the thought of his son lording over the Dark Heir pompously but Harry did not seem to have noticed, "He was very interested to know who I was, how did I get here and where was I going to and I told him I was HarryLestrangle."

"Lestrangle?" Lucius voice said in disbelief. "You do realize that that was the worst possible lie you could have told him do you? Bellatrix is his aunt. He could have asked her anytime he saw her about a certain Harry Lestrangle."

Harry didn't seem concerned at all and turned back to the mutilated dummy, casting the spell a couple more times. The minutes ticked by and suddenly, Bellatrix appeared at the doorway.

"Ha-rry," she sang, separating Harry's name into two. "The Dark Lord has instructed me to bring you to the grounds. Have you been spending three whole days with Lucius?" jealousy was evident in her voice as she sulked like a child. "The Lord and I hardly see you nowadays, and might I add that his temper his going worse as the days past? One would say that he wants to meet his heir and is displeased at the fact that you hardly see him nowadays."

Lucius gulped nervously. 'Would he...?'

Bellatrix turned to Lucius and gave him a wide smug smile. "Lucius, if you don't mind, the Dark Lord has ordered me to tell you to meet him in the Meeting Room immediately. And I would tread carefully on his toes if I were you Lucius," she added with mock concern. Apparently, she didn't appreciate the fact that Harry liked spending time with Lucius in training.

Harry stared puzzled at Lucius and Bellatrix who leered at Lucius once more before turning back to Harry, while the nervous look on Lucius's face remained. "While the Dark Lord deals with Lucius about his -what do you call it?- inappropriate over-long spending of time with you, we shall go to the grounds for a bit of a walk."

Harry's eyes lit up. The grounds? He had only been there once or twice. The number of times he was stressed on the fact that the grounds were dangerous, he couldn't remember already.

"And incidentally, you still look like them," Bellatrix reminded Harry as they walked away from the room, while Lucius went the other direction in hurried anxious steps, no doubt fearful that his actions earned him a round of crucios.

"Somewhat lesser," Bellatrix added when Harry glowered at her childishly.

"And," she added. "Did you tell young Malfoy that your last name was Lestrangle? He came looking for me a few days ago, asking about a Harry Lestrangle... Thought that I had an unknown son somewhere," she looked at Harry, smirking.

Harry's eyes widened innocently as he smiled at Aunt Bella. "It was the first name I could think of," he admitted, missing the pleased look that flashed across Bellatrix's face. "So did you tell him?"

"Tell him what?" Bellatrix feigned knowledge as the two walked along the grounds.

"That I'm not your son of course!" Harry said loudly.

"Of course not, but I told him that you were Rabastan's son with some Irish woman named Tressa? Or is it Tessa, no wait, Sarah. Nevermind, I can neverkeep up with the number of girlfriends Rabastan has... He's my husband's brother, that guy is. As insane as anyone I ever met," Bellatrix's mouth twisted into a sneer.

"You won't see much of young Malfoy nowadays anyway," she continued. "Lucius has sent his dear son everywhere around Britain for a social life and gatherings, and if he's not drowning in all those attention showered at the Malfoy Heir in some party or another,

Narcissa –my younger sister who is his mother- is playing dress up on him at all those stores... The poor boy," she added unconvincingly. "Not that the trolls he goes with are any better."

"Hmm..." Harry said as they continued walking along the pathway. No wonder he hadn't seen Malfoy in a long time... though it would be nice to have some company other than a over reactive Dark Lord and a possessive Death Eater around him all the time.

Harry turned towards Bellatrix just as he remembered about the Unforgivables. He had been so absorbed in his training that his research was stopped temporarily and cast into the back of his mind, until now.

"Aunt Bella, what about the Unforgivables I told you before?" he asked.

Bellatrix turned to Harry. "The Dark Lord has started his own research and he advises you to not worry too much about it and focus more on your training. Although, he is also looking into the area of pars–"

A loud crack rang through the air as a wizard dressed in Death Eater robes apparated next to Bellatrix, a wild look of panic on his face. He sported bruises and a particularly nasty cut which ran from his hairline to jaw on his face and his robes were tattered.

"Bellatrix!" he gasped and spluttered. "The raid, the Order unexpectedly turned up and we need reinforcements. Lucius and the Dark Lord have already went there and-"

"What?" Bellatrix had a look of pure horror on her face. "The raid? How could it be?" she shrieked.

Forgetting about Harry who was standing right next to her, Bellatrix turned and apparated on the spot to the location of the raid, leaving Harry standing alone. Before he could ask the wizard however, the wizard ran towards the dungeons in sheer panic, his robes flying all over as he nearly tripped across a fallen tree branch in his haste.

Harry shrugged. He was going to have to company himself, but that didn't matter too much. He knew that Bellatrix and the Dark Lord could handle themselves in a battle...

And his eyes caught a flash of platinum blond hair at the other end of the grounds.

He turned and the voice of Draco Malfoy floated up to him as he was assisted into the Manor by two house elves on either side of him. Malfoy was wearing a long black coat with a high collar and dressed smartly with his hair combed neatly to the back of his head.

"Where's mother and father?" Draco's arrogant voice not unlike his father's said loudly.

"At a raid, sir," the house elf at his right said quickly.

"Again?" a look of dismay flashed across Draco's face and for one moment, he looked like he was going to sulk but then he raised his head and saw Harry, his mouth opening into a wide O as he recognized Harry.

"Hey, you!" he pointed his hand at Harry who stopped. "Harry LeStrange! Haven't seen you in ages!"

Harry smiled in greeting. At least he had some company now. "So I've heard that you were in... France? Attending some social gathering, I suppose?"

"Spain," Draco scowled. "What are you doing here anyway? I thought Uncle Rabastan had already went back to London with Aunt Teresa?"

"Err... I wasn't following him and I would be staying here with Aunt Bella," Harry fibbed quickly. "What about you? Been quite busy as well, I see."

Draco smirked. "Yes. The gatherings are quite a bother, but," he raised his voice at Harry in arrogance. "They are of importance."

Harry walked with Draco in silence as they entered the Manor. Harry cast around for something to say and immediately thought of Draco's friends.

"Where are your friends? Crabbe and er, Goyle if I remembered correctly?"

Draco sneered at Harry. "Are you insane? Crabbe and Goyle are my friends?" even the six year old Malfoy sounded like his father as he continued in disgust. "They are more of my side kicks, if you get what I mean. Though, you don't look like one to follow, do you?" he glanced down at Harry in interest.

"Nope," Harry said simply as Draco suddenly rounded up on him.

"I suppose... but do you want to go to Diagon Alley? I haven't been there in ages and there's a new broom the Nimbus 1000 which I want to try out...Fastest speed ever!" he said excitedly and stopped in mid track.

"Diagon Alley? I- I'm not so sure... Aunt Bella specifically said I couldn't..." Harry hesitated.

"Oh come on Harry, it'll be fun. Besides, no one is at home, aren't they? If mother and father are on a raid, then I would bet everything I own that Aunt Bella is out there too, crucioing someone to insanity."

"I..."

"Harry, it will be fun," Draco persuaded Harry. He was itching to try out the Nimbus...

Harry looked up. What difference would this one trip make? Not much, he hoped. Besides, they weren't going to be there for a long time, just long enough to see the Nimbus and Bellatrix and Voldemort were on a raid... Nobody would know, he hadn't gone outside for quite sometime anyway...

"Oh, alright," Harry relented and Draco grinned in such a way that would make Lucius have a shock if he saw his heir behaving this way. "How are we going to get there anyway?"

"Oh?" Draco looked bored at Harry's question and snapped his fingers. The two house elves which have mysteriously disappeared now appeared in an instant by Draco's side and bowed deeply.

"Them," Draco pointed at the house elves and Harry nodded.

"You there, er, Binky or Twinky, whoever you are," Draco pointed at the first elf who looked up at Draco, awaiting his orders. "Apparate the both of us to Diagon Alley."

"Yes, master," the elf bowed again and took hold of Draco and Harry's hands. Harry noticed Draco wrinkling his nose in disgust before he consented to allow the elf to touch his perfect Malfoy hands.

A crack, and both Harry and Malfoy disappeared.

Harry blinked at the sudden change of surroundings as Draco landed on his left and the elf apparated back to the Manor with a wave of Draco's hands. It felt good to be back here in a similar place... yet something was wrong. It felt wrong for some odd reason.

Harry stared, lost in thoughts as he tried to figure out what was feeling so wrong.

"Harry? Harry?" Draco called, waving his hands at Harry's face as Harry stared, lost in thoughts.

"There," Draco pointed at Quality Quidditch Supplies which was at the end of the road, but Harry did not move. "Quality Quidditch Supplies. The store with the best brooms ever. The Nimbus 1000 Harry! Let's move," he huffed and dragged Harry along, but Harry would not budge.

Harry held up one hand to silence Draco as he continued staring at Diagon Alley...

And he felt his breath choke in his throat.

"Does it feel... a little quiet in here?"

Draco stopped in his tracks, the smile on his face sliding off as his eyes became tense and alert, darting around Diagon Alley and widened.

"Harry, there's no one else here!"

Harry nodded. The usually bustling Diagon Alley was quiet, without a sound and a shopper walking up and down the pavement. The

stores were quiet, there was not a soul around, yet, it didn't seem quiet somehow... There were voices from the corner at the end of the streets, loud voices and bangs and shrieks that were becoming louder.

Harry and Draco stared nervously at the sound of approaching footsteps round the corner. Not one footstep, but many, and the loud bangs were becoming louder and louder...

"Come on, let's go," Harry said quickly, deciding that something was drastically wrong. Diagon Alley couldn't be empty in the day, could it? "Call the elf, quick!"

Draco snapped his fingers but nobody came. He tried again, and again, all the while, the footsteps approached the two young boys...

"It's not working!" Draco yelled in frustration. "The elves are supposed to come whenever I call them. Binky? Twinky? Whoever you are, I order you to come, NOW!" Draco's voice risen childishly and he was close to screaming in his anxiety and fear.

But no elves came and the truth came dawning upon Harry. Draco turned slowly towards Harry, fear evident in his steel grey eyes.

"Anti Apparition Wards..."

Harry's eyes widened as he realized the bigger picture.

"The raid, the raid is in, DIAGON ALLEY!"

Harry could only stare in shock at Draco as the footsteps rounded round the corner and several wizards came pouring into the alley they were in.

Harry saw Lucius in his Death Eater robes and mask dueling with two wizards in Order of the Phoenix robes. He recognized Lucius only because of his aura yet neither was losing but Lucius needed help quickly. The two wizards were experienced duelers and were not above using dark spells in raids, it seemed. Lucius himself fired off Unforgivables and Dark curses at an alarming rate...

At another corner, a more major fight took place. Voldemort and Dumbledore stood battling each other. To Harry, this duel was like

no other. If Lucius was firing curses at an alarming rate, then Voldemort... the man had lightning speed. There was no hesitation, just curses.

"You cannot win me, Dumbledore!" Voldemort sneered while he conjured a large metal shield to block Dumbledore's jet of orange light. The moment the spell died as it hit the shield, Voldemort quickly fired off two Avada Kedavras which Dumbledore blocked almost effortlessly by summoning a large statue from the outside of Gladys Wizarding Wear where the fight was at.

"Tom, Tom, you never give up do you?" Dumbledore said with a sigh and Harry watched transfixed at the battle. Nobody seemed to notice the two children standing in the midst of the fight. It was life or death, everyone was battling for all their worth. The Death Eaters, to kill, torture and wound. The Order of the Phoenix, to save what was left of Diagon Alley. It seemed to Harry that the Death Eaters had managed to carve a pathway of destruction in Diagon Alley. All its occupants were hiding inside the stores, or, more accurately, what was left of a store. It was like a bomb had been dropped on Diagon Alley, everything lay destroyed.

Suddenly, a flash of red hair caught Harry's eyes. Harry saw Lily Potter dancing and weaving around as she dodged Bellatrix Lestrange's curse. The two of them were five feet away from Harry and this battle was just as intense. There was hatred in Lily's eyes while Bellatrix taunted her.

"Only the chosen one, you care for do you, mudblood?" Bellatrix sneered as she cast a crucio.

Lily's eyes widened in anger. "Stupefy!"

Bellatrix merely laughed as she danced out of the spell's way. "Crucio!" she screeched twice at Lily. Harry watched in horror as one of the spells hit Lily straight and she fell onto the ground, screaming and twitching. Bellatrix advanced onto her.

"So tell me, Evans, how is baby Joshua? The precious chosen one? He's nothing but a brat!" Bellatrix spat at Lily who somehow managed to glare at Bellatrix in the midst of her screams of pain.

"You will not insult Joshua! He will triumph over He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named! And when that day comes, the Light will win, and my Joshua will save us all!" Lily declared, even as she spat out a mouthful of blood, the pride in her eyes was evident.

"You think so, do you? Joshua is nothing. He is nothing now and you will DIE!"

Lily's eyes widened in anger.

Harry watched, transfixed as he saw the his mother's defensiveness on Joshua. The defensiveness he always wanted from Lily, to be directed at him. But no, Harry reminded himself, he was not a Potter anymore...

"Harry, we have to go!" Draco tugged on Harry's sleeve, his eyes taking in the scene, but Harry could not take his eyes off his mother.

With determination, Lily cast a banishing charm at Bellatrix, causing her to be banished towards Harry. Harry rushed towards Bellatrix, trying to pull her up. Bellatrix turned to Harry, shock on her face as she saw the young boy struggling to pull her back to her feet. She opened her mouth to yell for him to run, from this dangerous place where spells were rebounding all over, and that second cost her concentration as Lily jumped back up and pointed her wand at Bellatrix.

"Avada Kedavra!"

There was triumph in Lily's eyes. The stab on Joshua had clearly fuelled Lily's anger and she meant it. No one, she swore, would make fun and underestimate the Chosen One. And Lily meant it and Bellatrix would pay the price.

The jet of green light rushed towards Bellatrix who could do nothing to stop it as she watched in horror at her death. This light drew the attention of everyone, Death Eaters and the Order alike, even Voldemort and Dumbledore turned towards the blinding green spell that a member of the Order and the mother of the Chosen One had cast.

It was as though the adrenaline rush allowed Harry to absorb several details at once.

Bellatrix lay on the floor, unable to move while the members of the Order stared in shock at Lily. Was it a fleeting look of victory Harry saw in Dumbledore's ancient eyes? But most importantly, Harry saw the rage in Voldemort's eyes who screamed, "NO!" in the split second before the spell hit Bellatrix.

The anguished scream of his father was all it took for Harry to jerk awake and push Bellatrix out of the way. He stretched out both his hands towards the spell, trying to brace himself for the impact and willed with all his might for the spell to hit him instead of Bellatrix. Like a magnet, the spell veered off course and rushed straight at Harry, connecting straight at his palms, banishing him backwards and lighting him up in a eerily green glow, surrounding him.

Eyes widened at the sight of the boy's selfless act.

"Harry!"

The piercing voice of Lord Voldemort was the last thing Harry registered before his body was thrust high up into the sky, enveloped in the blinding jet of green light.

Author's Notes

Done at last! Took me quite some time to edit the whole thing, but it feels worth it. Please review! This scene is a bit of déjà vu from the previous chapter. Poor Harry gets hit again by a spell. And why is Harry the "Boy Who Lived"? There IS a reason, except in my fic, it isn't Voldemort who casts the Avada, but Lily Potter!

So will Harry survive? He might, and his mysterious gift will be revealed in the next chapter or the after.

Please review if you have the time!

5. The Boy Who Lived

"Avada Kedavra!"

The jet of green light rushed towards Bellatrix who could do nothing to stop it as she watched in horror at her death. Instinctively, Harry pushed Bellatrix out of the way and stretched out both his hands towards the spell, as though trying to brace himself for the impact and willed with all his might for the spell to hit him instead.

Like a magnet, the spell veered off course and rushed straight at Harry, connecting straight at his palms, lighting him up in an eerily green glow, surrounding him.

"No!"

The anguished voice of Voldemort was the last thing Harry registered as his body was thrust high up into the sky in the blinding jet of green light.

Harry wasn't really sure how it had all happened. He only remembered pushing Bellatrix out of the way and bracing himself from the impact to find himself thrown fifteen feet into the air enveloped by the eerie jet of green light which still connected himself with his mother's outstretched wand, forming a green thread between the two while he seemed to absorb the killing curse into him. Yet the depth of his eyes did not fade and the life in them did not dim. What was happening? He should have been dead in the instant the curse hit him, dead before his small body hit the floor of Diagon Alley.

Beside him, Bellatrix lay on the floor, staring up at Harry in pure shock. Even in his young age, the determination to save Bellatrix and die was clear. He held a certain power even as he was trapped in the green light above them all, drawing every eye towards him in the mere second he was blasted into the sky.

"No, stop!" Bellatrix screamed; she feared what the magic could do. The Avada Kedavra could kill him. Her master would be devastated, no matter whatever he said or acted. She knew he had grown attached to the boy not just because Harry was an asset to the Dark.

Lily Potter was in a similar position while she tried desperately to tug her wand away from the connection she shared with the mysterious boy. She found she couldn't and could only watch in horror as the green light seemed to fill the boy. She had cast the killing curse on an innocent boy. She couldn't think properly and her wide green eyes reflected disbelief and a tinge of fear at the eerie glow of the boy. He reminded her of someone, his facial features looked distinctly like someone she thought she might have known, but she could not ponder much into it for only a second had passed before the green light faded from view.

The crowd exhaled as one but they tensed again when they realised that the connection however, did not break. Instead, a thin golden thread emerged from Lily's wand after the last of the green jet was gone and took its place. The thread poured into Harry's outstretched hands. Now, Harry was enclosed in a bright shimmering golden bubble.

Unlike the killing curse which whispered darkness, the golden bubble was so Light and obviously pure, so magical that everyone could come to the same conclusion in an instant. The golden thread reeked of magic power and it seemed to have come from Lily Potter herself, her own magical core.

The Light could only watch in horror at the young boy draining Lily's magic right from her magical core after he had absorbed the killing curse. With nothing else left to absorb, the young boy had not broke the connection but continued absorbing its only source left- Lily's magical core.

Dumbledore would not have that. He would not have one of his best fighters being drained of magic from an unknown stranger, one that had an stunningly alluring aura at such a young age. Summoning his own magic, he forcefully cast a banishing charm at the boy.

It hit Harry straight in the chest and all the breath was knocked from him; he flew far behind and landed in a heap on the floor, but not before Voldemort cast a cushioning charm.

"Dumbledore!" Voldemort advanced towards Dumbledore raising his wand threateningly as he cast a cruciarcus curse towards him while Bellatrix quickly scuttled towards where Harry lain on the floor.

Dumbledore dodged the curse while the Light retreated behind him as one and the Dark behind Voldemort. The Light and the Dark stood opposite each other, separated by an invisible line marked by their Lords. The fight seemed to have been forgotten at the miracle that appeared in front of their eyes. A boy, a young boy in fact, had survived the killing curse.

The killing curse, which killed everyone whom it hit, unstoppable and yet, the boy did not have a scratch on him.

With the help of Bellatrix, Harry stood up, walking towards Voldemort, his eyes cold. Now that he was back on earth, he seemed to have registered several things. Somehow, it pained him to know that his mother had cast a killing curse on him although it wasn't aimed at him. He might have absorbed her magic instead of dying from the curse, yet he didn't feel like celebrating. All he felt was the pain in knowing his mother had very nearly killed him.

Payback time to the Light.

"Father," Harry said in an emotionless tone, as if nothing had happened. He nodded to Voldemort, barely loud enough for the Light to hear.

Dumbledore's eyes lost its twinkle and the Order gasped. Voldemort had an heir? Voldemort's smug smile of victory was obvious for all to see as inclined his head towards Harry. The child, the only person in existence to survive the killing curse was his son. This was going to be a huge blow to the Light, now that the existence of a mere child who could not be killed had joined the dark.

"Who is this?" Dumbledore demanded at once. Lily Potter was slowly helped up by fellow member of the Order, Hestia Jones, while she walked forward towards Harry, her face pale yet with defiance in her green eyes.

Voldemort cast a lazy glance towards Harry and smirked. "My son, Dumbledore. Have you not heard him address me as Father?"

"And, what, did your Heir do to Lily Potter's magic?" Cold fury radiated in every syllable of Dumbledore's aged voice as he walked towards Harry slowly, Lily behind him, supported by Hestia.

Dumbledore seemed unwilling to address Harry as Voldemort's son, instead, as his Heir.

Hearing Dumbledore's voice seemed to have sparked the hidden, building anger within Harry. Here was Dumbledore, the Light Lord, headmaster of Hogwarts, yet Dumbledore and his prophecy was what really caused Harry to have a miserable childhood. His only friend in Godric Hollows had been Lupin, but Dumbledore had taken him away from Harry. Dumbledore knew how much Lupin was to Harry. It was really Dumbledore's fault. How had he known that Joshua was the Chosen One in the first place? There really was no proof other than a dusty sphere.

Harry raised his eyes towards Dumbledore, piercing him with his emerald eyes which was so alike Lily's. For a split second, Dumbledore thought he saw a ghost of Lily Evans within the depths of the intense green eyes but it vanished the moment the boy spoke, for his eyes hardened at the sight of him.

"I absorbed it." Harry said tonelessly. Such a simple answer which Dumbledore had guessed, yet hearing the boy confirm it seemed to have sparked his worst fears. The boy could absorb magic. What about his magic? He could not allow his magic to be absorbed...

A sudden bang caused him to turn. Lily had advanced towards Harry, her wand raised, anger in her eyes, intending to curse the boy for robbing her from her magic. Pure hatred was etched within her face. Several members of the Light looked shocked at the expression on Lily's face. How could Lily have such hatred and bitterness in her? She was the lively, popular girl of Gryffindor.

Before Lily could curse Harry, Bellatrix flicked her wand towards Lily and she was thrown back to the crowd.

"You will not touch him ever again!" Bellatrix snarled at Lily but did not make any move to curse her. Voldemort put an arm on Bellatrix's to restrain her and turned coldly towards Lily.

"You will not touch my son ever or your son will die," Voldemort said dangerously, sparks flying from his wand. "Joshua Potter, I've heard?" he continued conversationally and Lily's eyes widened in fear. "He does not have an ounce of power, not even the faintest trace of an aura, I see. He is of no threat to my reign. You are all

fools to believe a mere boy could ever be my equal," he said dismissively.

Lily opened her mouth but Dumbledore spoke. "Allow your son to return Lily her magic. This is against the laws, he cannot rob a witch of her magic. Especially the mother of the Chosen One!"

Harry flinched slightly but the movement was not missed by Dumbledore and he quickly took the chance, stepping forwards towards Harry, though careful enough not to cross the invisible line between the Light and Dark.

"Harry, you know you want to return Lily her magic. You know it's wrong to steal a witch's power. The magic in her has stayed so long that she will wither away now that it's stolen. Her body has grown dependant to the magic, she relies on it for day to day things. Without her magic, it is like losing a limb," Dumbledore said slowly. "Return her magic to her, you know she needs it to survive... You don't really want to have Lily's death on your conscience... young Heir..."

A loud screech from Bellatrix made Harry turn to Dumbledore.

"A witch's power?" she cackled. "A mudblood does not deserve to be a witch. It's only right she returns her magical powers to those who were born with it! Mudbloods have stolen witches and wizards magical cores, with Harry, he can absorb all of their stolen magic! He is a prodigy, a rarity, a gift to the wizarding world, to rid us of the mudbloods!"

Dumbledore paled slightly at the thought of muggleborns being absorbed of their magic.

"She will survive," Harry said suddenly. All eyes turned towards Harry. "I can feel the magic in her. She still has enough magic within her."

"Ah yes you will see that my heir is kind enough to leave some magic back for Lily," Voldemort interrupted before Dumbledore could continue his manipulated persuasion. "Though, I have to thank Lily for sacrificing part of her magic. For a mudblood, she is powerful and the magic that my heir absorbed will equalise him to about a fourth year," Voldemort smirked. "An even more powerful heir, I now

have. I do have the mudblood to thank." Nobody apart from Voldemort and Harry heard the double meaning in Voldemort's last sentence.

Lily blanched. Her magic was stolen? She was reduced to a near squib! Her family her job, she could no longer take part in Order missions, she knew, her magical core was drained... And it was given to the Dark Heir, for nothing! All her years of studying in the Hogwarts Library, yet now, effortlessly, she was drained of her magic. She cursed herself for not successfully killing the Dark Heir. Now her Joshua would have to face the Dark Heir as well as the Dark Lord. And the Dark Heir seemed like a more dangerous threat.

Voldemort raised his hand and snapped his fingers, breaking the anti apparition wards with ease in an instant and summoned the Malfoy heir towards him. Dumbledore made no move to stop him, knowing that the battle was over. Draco who had previously fainted, missing all the action and was now revived by his father who stood next to Voldemort, silently observing with worry.

Voldemort gave the cue. As one, the Dark disappeared with Voldemort pulling Harry along with him, leaving destruction in their wake.

Back at Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore was irritated, angry and to tell the truth, a little scared. He had to clear up Lily Potter's mess for casting the Killing Curse which resulted in several letters to the Ministry and Minister Fudge himself before Lily was cleared of all charges without a trial. If not for the support that the Potter's had in the Wizarding Community, Dumbledore would have preferred to leave Lily to the clutches of the Dementors for messing up his plans.

In everyone of those letters, he had emphasised that Lily was the mother of the Chosen One and having her in Azkaban was not going to do the Light any good, especially to Joshua if he were motherless. Furthermore, the curse was cast at Bellatrix Lestrange, otherwise known as Voldemort's second in command or the Dark Lady, and the most wanted person by Wizarding Britain, right after Voldemort.

Yet at the back of his mind, he was very worried about the current situation. Clearing up Lily's mess had been nothing, but the sudden revelation that Voldemort had an heir was very worrying indeed, especially an heir so powerful at his young age. Like Voldemort and

Lucius, Dumbledore could sense auras. The young boy's aura did not pale in comparison to some of the Order, yet he was not of age and did not have proper education so far. Also, he only had the usual one-third access to his magical core. Only wizards of age would be able to access the rest of their magical cores.

But all hope is not lost, Dumbledore continued to remind himself. He had seen the slight hesitation in the young Heir's eyes as he struggled about the choice of whether to return Lily's magic or not. It would be good if the Heir could join the Light; Dumbledore was sure that it would cause the Dark quite a bit of trouble and devastation. Not that Dumbledore would admit it, but if played correctly, in ten years time, the young Heir could play quite a part in the war, perhaps even more so than the Chosen One if Joshua still did not buck up.

If he could join the Light, then together with Joshua Potter, the outcome of the war would surely be favourable to the Light and he, Dumbledore, would be hailed as the wizard who defeated not one, but two Dark Lords in the wizarding world. The world would never forget him, the saviour of the Light!

But that did not seem possible right now. Dumbledore sighed at the thought of Joshua Potter. Ever since the disappearance of Harry Potter, Joshua seemed to have lost most of his enthusiasm in his training. Usually, he used his training as a tool to goad to his younger brother, but now, there was nobody he could brag to. Furthermore, Joshua was still not meeting Dumbledore's standard. Admittedly, Joshua was not magically weak yet he did not reek of power... the way the Dark Heir or Tom Riddle had.

A sudden knock on the door caused Dumbledore to be jerked out of his thoughts.

"Come in," he said in his aged voice, trying not to show his annoyance at being interrupted.

Lily and James Potter entered, Sirius Black behind them. Lily was swinging her long red hair to cover her face. The guilt was evident in her emerald eyes and remorse was written all over her face. James looked disapprovingly at Lily while Sirius had an unusually sombre look on his face.

Dumbledore waved his wand and three chintz armchairs appeared. "Sit," he inclined his head towards the chairs and they moved forward.

"Albus," Lily said the moment she sat down. "I know it was wrong of me to have cast the killing curse, and I thank you for helping me to stay out of Azkaban from the bottom of my heart."

Inwardly, Dumbledore smirked. He would have Lily's loyalty assured because of the favour he helped her and in turn, the Chosen One will always be on his side, indebted towards him.

James added in his perfect pureblood grace, "I hope this has not caused much trouble in the Ministry? We are here, however, because we wanted to discuss about Joshua with you."

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "Yes. How is the training going?"

Lily spoke up once more. "Joshua seems... a little less inclined towards the training now that... Harry is gone. His magical core is still growing as far as James and I can tell, and we think that perhaps, having Neville Longbottom train with him will spark his interest in duelling once more."

Dumbledore considered for a minute. "Neville, you say? Very well, arrange it with Frank or Alice then. I believe that Longbottom's presence should spark Joshua's competitive spirit."

Lily nodded. Silence fell between them for a moment before Dumbledore peered at them over his half-moon spectacles and said, "Anything you would like to add?" He was tired of all the pleasantries, all he wanted was a good night's sleep.

Sirius exchanged a look with Lily while James looked disapproving. Sirius turned back to Dumbledore and hesitated for a second, which was very unlike him.

"Yes, it's about... the Dark Heir," Sirius began slowly, looking hesitant.

Dumbledore's eyes became alert instantly. "And what about the Dark Heir?"

"It's just... James believes that the Dark Heir is not Voldemort's true birth son and he thinks that he might have been kidnapped from one of the pureblood families at a young age. Lily and I disagree obviously, but..." Sirius paused while Dumbledore invited him to continue. "James thinks there's a chance we could persuade the Dark Heir to change sides."

"An interesting idea you have, Sirius," Dumbledore said while James looked at Dumbledore seriously. "That was what I've been thinking as well. However, I do not think it is highly possible. For one, Voldemort has shown signs that he would cease part of the war, we believe that he is about to change his policy."

Lily's eyes widened. Changing policies? "But- But what does that mean?" she said quickly.

"We have inside information that Voldemort is planning to stop preventing muggleborns from being included in our world, but instead, to allow certain more powerful muggleborns to be included. However, their families will have to be sworn to secrecy using the Unbreakable Vow and anyone who violates the rule will be given the Kiss immediately."

"And those that are not qualified to be included...?"

"Their magic will be destroyed and all memories will be obliterated," Dumbledore sighed once more. "And I believe that the Wizarding World would accept this changes in order to stop the war. Currently, the Chosen One is still young and hopes that the Light will win is still dim."

"Shouldn't we dispose of the Dark Heir? He might prove to be too much of a threat," Lily said once more. Though glad that she was not a squib, it was apparent that she was still bitter in having her magic robbed by a boy, reducing her to an average witch, no longer holding power above others.

"Perhaps, but he would be an asset to the war and I do not think that it would be easy to capture him. Certainly Voldemort would have protection around him. We will wait for the boy to grow and decide then. If he comes to Hogwarts, then there might be a greater chance in persuading him to turn sides."

Lily nodded unwillingly and Dumbledore dismissed all three with a wave of his hand.

"And Lily?" he called after a moment's pause.

Lily's hands hesitated on the door knock and she turned together with James, fearing the worst.

"I'm afraid you will have to be excluded from further Order missions," Dumbledore said. What was the expression in his eyes?

Lily nodded.

500 miles away, Voldemort sat in his study, thinking hard. What was that phenomenon he had just witnessed? Were his eyes playing tricks on him, or did he just see Harrison, his Harrison, in fact, absorb the killing curse? The very curse which was unblockable and the same curse which he used to claim the lives of many others who stood in his way of world domination.

He couldn't fathom how a boy had managed to achieve this miracle. He was puzzled and greatly impressed. One thing he did know though – it was his luck that the Potters drove the boy towards him. If he could figure out the boy's tricks, his survival would be ensured. Even with his horcruxes, he had to admit that the idea of floating around looking for bodies to possess did not sound appealing to him.

What was this ancient magic? He thought. And then the answer came to him in one swift stroke. Of course, he blamed himself for not realising it earlier. The Unforgivables were too powerful to be absorbed by normal absorption charms. The very way Harrison had absorbed it was not by a charm – he certainly did not see the boy performing any charms – it was pure magic, ancient magic, like a magical gift – a skill.

Voldemort raised his wand as he summoned a certain book from the Malfoy library. At last, the sacred book zoomed towards him and he eagerly flipped it open. How long had he hidden the knowledge-thirsty Tom Riddle within him as he plotted against the Ministry and the meddling old coot Dumbledore?

Voldemort scanned the pages quickly and there it was at last – the very magical talent Harrison possessed. Such a gift was a rarity, the

last a person was known to have this gift was three centuries ago and he grew to be a very, very, powerful Dark Lady and only died on her three hundred and twenty second birthday which signalled the end of the ancient war.

An exhilarating thought struck Voldemort. This gift belonged to Voldemort as well! The Blood Ritual ensured that if present, the strongest magical talent both wizards have would also manifest itself in the other wizard. Could he possibly be a master of this magical talent? He could rule the world with his son, he decided. With his horcrux, he did not fully intend to survive for centuries alone. His son could rule the world with him.

With it, there was no doubt on how much his magical core could grow – leaps and bounds he was sure. It would be far greater than any wizard's, oh, Voldemort promised himself.

But first, it was time to summon his precious son.

Harry entered the room nervously with Lucius, Bellatrix and Draco. Bellatrix looked eager and Lucius curious. The only person who could possibly look more terrified than himself currently would be Draco. Harry chanced a glance at the young Malfoy Heir. Clearly, the Nimbus did not look appealing enough now that he was surely in trouble, though for what trouble, he did not know as he had fainted when Harry addressed Voldemort as Father.

"Enter," the high cold voice of Voldemort rang out.

Harry gulped. He knew the scolding would surely come. He was aware of Voldemort's curt instructions to stay within the safe boundaries of the Malfoy Manor. But how, he thought, could he and Draco be as unlucky as to apparate right to where the riot took place?

Harry dragged his feet as he reluctantly walked into the room with Bellatrix towards Voldemort. Lucius and Draco merely stood straight at the side, watching.

"My Lord," Bellatrix shuffled forward, bowing low to Voldemort's feet, kissing the hem of his robes.

"Father," Harry said resignedly and he thought he heard Draco's hurriedly stifled gasp behind him.

Voldemort looked down on him from his high chair and looked at him with high disapproval.

"Harrison," he acknowledged. "Have I not warned you about staying within the wards of the Manor? And yet, I find you in Diagon Alley in the middle of the day, accompanied by the young Malfoy Heir. I expected better from you," disappointment coloured his voice.

Harry did not reply. It was as though his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth, leaving his throat quite dry.

"My concern, however, is not within this matter. Although, I expect you to pay heed to my words in future? Such an act would not go unpunished the next time. Do I make this plain?"

Harry's head snapped up. Unpunished? He wasn't going to punished? Nevertheless, he wasn't going to complain. He still had not forgotten how the cruciartus hurt during his first meeting with Voldemort.

"Yes, father," Harry promised. I suppose you want to hear about the... killing curse and the absorption...in Diagon Alley?"

Voldemort gave a satisfied smile. "Very good," his lips curled. "Do you have any idea how that phenomenon happened? Such a thing is unheard of, even in the wizarding world. To the best extend of my knowledge, no one, not even the great Rowena Ravenclaw who was killed by the killing curse has survived it."

"I..."

"It is my concern, however," Voldemort continued. "That the absorption you used on the killing curse is not a charm nor a curse, hex or jinx. It is something much more, an ancient magic within your blood, manifesting only when you felt ... -ah- compelled to use it in urgent situations."

"It resides... in my blood since I was born then?" Harry asked, his Ravenclaw-like curiosity coming out.

"Correct," Voldemort said. "And it just happens that I have knowledge of the particular gift you were born with. Such a talent has been thought to die out in the ancient bloodlines. A rarity, one of the best magical talents there is in the wizarding world. The last anyone saw of that gift was three centuries ago, by a Dark Lady Miranda Goldsword. She conquered wizarding Russia and her war only ceased when she died of old age." Voldemort paused, looking for Harry for a reaction. There was none.

Bellatrix and Lucius were hanging on to Voldemort's every word now, almost leaning forward to hear their lord's next words about the powerful gift that could absorb the Unforgivables. A rarity, in their midst, at the Dark's side? The outcome of the war would surely be favourable to them now. Even Draco, who could not understand half the words of the Dark Lord was curiously looking at Harry.

"And..." Harry said slowly, hesitantly. "What is the name of the gift?" he said quietly.

"You, my dear Harrison, are born with the Absorbere Gift."

Author's Notes

One more chapter done! This took quite a long time for me, as both my laptops crashed in a space of one week so the writing had to be stopped for a while but everything is back to normal. There will also be a time skip in Chapter 7 as this fic is mainly on Harry when he is older and meets Joshua. His choice of school has been confirmed, great thanks to everyone who voted for their favourite school! Lastly, if anyone has any idea/preference of how they want the story to continue, please leave it in your review as well. Although I've mainly got the whole story planned out, I'm open to suggestions to improve the fic.

Please review if you have the time!

6. The Le Fey Curse

It was as though the world had gone silent. The twittering birds fell silent, the rustling of the leaves stopped when the faint breeze vanished – as if on cue for a dramatic revelation.

Harry noticed all of these as he tried to register what Voldemort had just said, but it wasn't everyday that a six year old realized that he possessed a rare magical gift. Magical gifts were a rarity, and some were even more prized than others. By the sound of it, it felt as though the Absorbere was formidable.

'To absorb the killing curse ought to count as something', Harry thought.

What was the Absorbere Gift? Harry was dimly aware that such a gift would not be accepted in the society, especially if it could render a witch or wizard as a squib if Harry wanted to. Pureblood witches and wizards like the Blacks and Malfoys would rather die than to let their magic be stripped from them, leaving them as a mere muggle.

An abomination, he could hear the taunts of his brother if he were here. A freak, said his Aunt Petunia whom he had the unfortunate to meet once. A queer son to have, his mother would have told him scathingly.

"Father..." Harry wasn't sure how he should reply.

Voldemort gave a sigh. "Harry, the Absorbere Gift is an immensely rare gift and little records were made of it, hence, it is unlikely that you came across it in all the nights you spent at the Malfoy Library. However, I managed to summon a book about the Absorbere which you should take a look at."

Wandlessly, Voldemort flicked his hand gracefully and the book appeared once more. It was old and dusty, faded ink on the cover of the leather bound book. Nevertheless, it held a look of ancient knowledge buried deep within the wizarding world.

Harry walked forward and took the book in his small hands carefully, as though wary of the sacred book. The moment the book touched his hands, it seemed to have a mind of its own and flipped to a page somewhere in the middle.

At last, the clouds of dust settled onto the pristine white carpet and Harry lifted the book up and silently began to read while the other occupants of the room stood watching, curious but not quite daring to move or speak.

The Le Fey Curse

The Le Fey Curse was first known in wizarding France in 1328. It originated from a young boy named Charlus Le Fey the Second, heir to the prestigious Le Fey family, son of Lord Charlus Le Fey and his wife Lady Pristine Le Fey née Malfoy. At the tender age of 4, young Charlus developed the ability –which the then people termed it- to suck the power and magical energy of people and certain dark artefacts.

The ability was shortly developed after Charlus was involved in a potion accident when the potion exploded. Although physically fine after the accident, Charlus's healer thought that remnants of the potion still remained in Charlus's blood system which might have interacted with his magical core, hence creating the infamous Le Fey Curse.

The Le Fey Curse was thought to be something evil, dangerous and abnormal even in the wizarding world. Many assumed that the curse died out with Charlus's death at the age of 29, just after the birth of his only son, Gabriel Le Fey, but it resurfaced many years later, in 1492, by Charlus's descendent, Elizabeth Mallory Le Fey.

Elizabeth eventually became a Dark Lady. Like Charlus, Elizabeth possessed that extraordinary gift. Unlike Charlus, however, Elizabeth's gift was only shown when she was attacked by several Vampires at the age of 14 when the miracle gift saved Elizabeth's life, but her life changed drastically afterwards.

Elizabeth Le Fey was magically more powerful than Charlus for he died at a young age and did not harness the full power of the curse, but instead, strived to keep it hidden within him. On the other hand, Elizabeth started researching on the curse and eventually mastered it, learning how to control it like any other muscle in her body. Rumors flew that Elizabeth was magically stronger than Merlin as she had the combined power of several powerful Lords and Ladies who she deemed unworthy to possess magic.

Eventually, the Le Fey name died out with Elizabeth's death as she was the only child and daughter of Lenord and Julia Le Fey. It is unclear who Elizabeth might have married for the marriage was very private and most people believed that Elizabeth married a Light pureblood family, which was not widely accepted in the community for the Le Feys were known to be a Dark pureblood family. However, whoever Elizabeth married, the curse did not die out but continued on in other ancient pureblood lines, usually remaining dormant in the witches and wizards.

For example, the latest carrier of the curse, Dark Lady Miranda Goldsword was proven to be a Le Fey descendent. It is widely speculated that Elizabeth's children and descendants married other pureblood lines and not die out; hence the curse was not erased from the wizarding world.

In Modern Times, however, the Le Fey curse is now appreciated as the Absorbere Gift and listed under the Gifts of Rarity and the 5 Rare Gifts or Curses of the Wizarding World, which includes the Makinson Curse, the Manipulation Gift, Parseltongue and the Phoenix's Curse.

The extent of the normal witches and wizards despise of the Le Fey Curse was shown in 1731, where Russian Minister Volonski banned the usage of the curse for fear of his people being robbed of their magic. It was clear that this ban was aimed at the Dark Lady for she was the only known possessor of the curse at that period of time. In retaliation, Dark Lady Goldsword launched a massive attack in Russia and wiped out the last of the Volonski line, ensuring the lift of the ban by its next minister.

At last, Harry looked up to see the piercing crimson eyes of Lord Voldemort surveying him.

"Is that all?" he asked Voldemort. "The book does not say much about the curse... but more of its history and how it came by."

Voldemort nodded his head at Harry's words. "Yes it's true that the book does not say much about the curse. However, it has given us several important points. For one, because of the mention of Elizabeth Mallory Le Fey, I have managed to track down her autobiography, her own personal journal."

"And, what does it say...?"

"Elizabeth noted on one particular entry that when she came of age, she was forced to declare as a Lady. Only witches and wizards of immense power can be declared as a Lord or a Lady. The Lords we see in Wizengamot such as your own father, Lord Potter, and your godfather, Lord Black, are not the type of Lord that we are looking for here."

Seeing Harry's look of confusion at his young face, Voldemort suddenly remembered that despite how Harry was mature for his age, he was still a six year old child and hastened to simplify his words.

"When a witch or a wizard has a powerful magical core, there will come a time whereby the magic within him or her will cause her to declare as a Lady or a Lord. While normal Wizengamot Lords and Ladies can be Dark or Light, when declaring Lord or Lady for powerful witches and wizards, they will have to either declare as a Light or Dark Lord or Lady. It cannot be both, they cannot stay neutral for the Light and Dark magic in their magical core cannot co-exist peacefully, in a way and would eventually turn inwards destroying them."

Harry paused for a moment before he asked, "And you declared as a Dark Lord?"

Voldemort smiled at Harry's understanding. Even he had taken a short while to fully understand the whole Lord business. "Correct. Declaring as a Dark Lord will allow me to use Dark Magic more forcefully than Light Magic, meaning that my Light Magic will not be as powerful as that of Light Lords, but the missing power will go to the Dark Magic, ensuring that I excel in Dark Magic. It does not mean that my Light Magic would be inferior, only less powerful than the Dark Magic. Dumbledore on the other hand, chose Light Magic and hence, his Dark Magic will be significantly weaker than mine. Of course, it also depends on the wizard's original magical core."

"And I have to declare as a Lord?" Harry said slowly.

"You do, for the Light and Dark magic in you cannot exist peacefully. One will have to be stronger than the other, and most Lords and

Ladies declare to the Dark side for Dark Magic is much more ancient and has a larger branch of magic to explore. Although, Dumbledore will never admit it."

Harry could not do anything but nod at the words. It seemed like his life was full of surprises. Now, even at such a young age, he knew he could not just be any normal wizard any longer. Then a thought struck him.

"Father, the book mentioned that the Le Fey Curse will enable one to absorb the magical core of artifacts and wizards and witches. But does that ... curse include magical creatures, like werewolves and vampires? Will absorbing the power of a vampire make the absorber a vampire in a sense, with the vampire's immortality, strength and speed and the need to feed on blood a part of them too?"

A look of surprise flitted across Voldemort's usually emotionless face before it settled back to its usual calm mask. Really, when was Harry going to stop surprising him with his in-depth thinking, that even him, the greatest Dark Lord has not thought of yet?

By the looks of it, even Lucius and Bellatrix were surprised. The young Malfoy heir was looking lost and confused at the conversation and Voldemort smirked mentally. No doubt he had no idea what Harry's musings were about, nor the importance of the points he pointed out.

"That, I think is possible. In fact, I think that it is very possible," the corners of Voldemort's lips lifted and he was actually smiling. "According to records, Charlus Le Fey died after an attack with werewolves. It is unclear if the werewolves actually bit him, but now, there is a possibility that Charlus attempted to absorb the werewolves' magical core. If unsuccessful, then Charlus might have been poisoned from the absorption." Voldemort paused. "But I think, more research would be necessary to confirm it."

"Will the research be done by yourself?" Harry asked.

Voldemort considered for a minute. "Yes. I think it is best for the gift not to be spread too far to too many ears. There's a chance that Dumbledore does not know the existence of this gift. His refusal to read on Dark Magic may signify his ... lessened knowledge of the

Dark Arts. For now, let us try with the absorption gift. Bella, up here now."

Bellatrix shuffled forward eagerly and knelt down beside Harry, saying, "My Lord," delightedly. Only Bellatrix would be enthusiastic with any task her Lord wanted her to do.

Voldemort looked down at her. "You know what to do," he said softly and for a moment. Was it a look of regret that flashed across his face as he turned back to Harry?

"Harrison, Bellatrix here will attempt to curse you with the Cruciatus Curse. I cannot promise that it will not hurt, but I will prevent her from overdoing it and causing you to end up insane. Not very desirable to have an insane heir, of course. You, will attempt to absorb the curse. Fail to do so, and it will hurt. The Imperius Curse would do as well, but from what Lucius tells me, you are able to throw it off."

Bellatrix turned to Harry, a look of apology on her face as she turned her wand to Harry's small body. Draco was torn between the desire to see Bellatrix perform her infamous curse that she was so widely feared and adored for but was unwilling to see it being performed on his friend. Or his almost friend anyway, Draco wasn't sure if the Dark Heir was like the Dark Lord, so isolated without friends.

"Crucio."

Bellatrix's voice rang out and Harry immediately dropped to the floor, twitching in pain as he convulsed violently. The curse hurt as much as he remembered it from his first day at the Manor months ago and he struggled not to make a sound, but even so, a whimper of pain escaped him. In that instant, he quite forgot that he was supposed to be fighting against the curse but was concentrating too much on the intense pain to remember anything else.

"Fight the curse, Harrison. Absorb the curse," Voldemort's voice came and it seemed to come from a place far away, far away.

Every nerve of his body was on fire, white hot knives were stabbing every inch of his body mercilessly and Harry struggled to stand.

Ten more seconds went by. It felt like an hour to Harry.

"Enough," came the high cold voice of Voldemort and the pain ended as soon as it came but Harry's body was still in the fire-like pain.

"Father," Harry gasped as he struggled to stand then fell on the ground again.

"We will try it once more before we retire for the day. I hope you do not disappoint me Harrison," Voldemort said, trying not to show any emotions at his son convulsing in pain in front of him once more. Truth was, he wanted to stop cursing Harry if he could not absorb it. Harry was only six after all, there were many years more to train him.

"Crucio," Bellatrix said.

Once again, Harry fell to the floor. This time, he could not help the screams that escaped him. 'It's not real, it's not real, it's not real.' Harry repeated to himself. 'It's an illusion, it doesn't hurt, this is not real...'

Harry chanted to himself a dozen times and felt the curse beginning to fade as he could think clearly for the first time. Before that, all Harry could think of was pain and more pain, but now, his thoughts began to clear a little for him to do what any witch and wizard would do when attacked. He wanted to defend himself and in that instant, he forgot about the Absorbere gift and also quite forgot that the person cursing him was his Aunt Bella.

'It's not real!' Harry told himself again in his mind and the pain dulled and hummed, giving him a second to perform his spell.

"Scrisor!" Harry yelled the first curse that came to his mind and it did not occur to him that he was performing wandless magic.

Bellatrix shrieked and the pain lifted at once. He was dimly aware of Voldemort jumping up from his high chair and quickly masking his surprised expression. Bellatrix was wide eyed with terror as she saw the deep gash across her chest where her expensive silk robe was slashed apart.

"Harrison," Voldemort said before hurriedly healing Bellatrix in an instant before turning back to Harry who was white with pain and fear.

"F- father! I didn't mean to, I mean I-I was panicking and I didn't I don't-" Harry was struggling to speak but he couldn't. He was in shock. He had attacked his Aunt Bella.

Seconds later, Bellatrix slowly crawled back to her feet, her wound healed by her master and Harry immediately rushed forward to her and hugged her.

"Aunt Bella!" he said in relief.

Bellatrix looked down at Harry and her anger vanished in an instant as he looked down at the boy in front of her. If Harry were any other person, he would have been Crucioed to insanity by now.

"Harrison," Voldemort said, breaking into Harry's thoughts.

"Father..." Harry said slowly, remorse on his face.

"You threw off the Cruciatus Curse," Voldemort said and Harry did not reply.

He nodded slowly, letting go of Bellatrix.

"You threw off Bellatrix's Cruciatus Curse which should have driven you to insanity instead. Impressive."

"But I hurt Aunt Bella!" Harry exclaimed when he realized that Voldemort was not angry, but impressed. How could Voldemort be impressed with it?

"It is inevitable," Voldemort said dismissively

"What matters is, you, my son, are close to invincible. The Avada Kedavra could not kill you, the Imperius Curse and the Cruciatus Curse do not affect you," Voldemort announced.

"The Potters are known descendents of Godric Gryffindor and I, Salazar Slytherin. With the Blood Ritual, it ensured that the both of us are now descendents of Gryffindor and Slytherin, which could

explain your immense magical powers. In addition, you absorbed Lily Potter's magic." There was a long pause while Voldemort mused.

"Nevertheless, it might be useful if the Light does not know of your heritage," Voldemort concluded and Harry nodded quickly.

"You may go," he said with a wave of his hands. "Draco, follow Harrison out and let him rest in his room. Bella and Lucius, stay. I need to speak to you."

Harry turned to Draco and beckoned him out of the room. However, before he exited, he could have sworn that he saw Voldemort smile a genuine smile and the words "You have done me proud, my son, very proud." But the next instant, he was swept into the corridor of the Malfoy Manor.

"My Lord...?" came the quiet voice of Lucius Malfoy as he remained in the room.

"Lucius." Voldemort acknowledged. "I am thinking of moving Harry to the Riddle Manor. By next morning, he would be recognized as the Dark Heir, no doubt by the Prophet and the meddling old fool. While his appearance would still change to certain extents over the next few years, I don't want him recognized as of yet."

"I... it's a good suggestion, My Lord."

Voldemort sneered. "And I'm thinking of sending him to Durmstrang. Incidentally, Travers has a daughter the same age as Harry, does he not?"

"Yes, my Lord," Lucius nodded. "Are you thinking...?"

Voldemort smirked. "I will arrange for Harry to be moved to the Riddle Manor for his first few years of education and for now. It would be quite a long time, but I will also be moving part of my base over to the Riddle Manor and I would possibly be staying there. As for Travers's daughter, arrange for her to be schooled at Durmstrang when the time comes. Draco will remain at Hogwarts, however. We need spies within Hogwarts and Draco would do the job."

"It's an honour, my Lord, for Draco to be serving you," Lucius said silkily.

Bellatrix took advantage of Voldemort's silence and said quickly, "My Lord, when will Harry be moved back to the Malfoy Manor?"

Voldemort did not reply but paused for a few seconds before he said, "When he is old enough to be introduced to the Inner Circle, we will shift our base back. For now, let no one know of his location and our change in base. Except," Voldemort looked at Lucius. "the young Malfoy Heir."

Lucius looked shocked.

"It would do Harry good to have company. I trust that young Draco can be trusted to be quiet?"

"Of course, my Lord. Draco would know better than to say a single word about the Dark Heir," Lucius said quickly. "It is a privilege for us, to be serving the Dark Heir."

"I know it is," Voldemort said curtly and he dismissed both Lucius and Bellatrix.

The next morning dawned early, sunlight streaming through the windows of his room and shone onto Harry's bed. He groaned as he covered his face with a pillow but decided that it wasn't enough to block out the sunshine and added another to it, lost in his thoughts.

It had been a long day. Harry briefly recalled everything he did yesterday, ranging from meeting Draco once more to going to Diagon Alley without permission by the Dark Lord and eventually, being hit by the killing curse. Even more surprising, surviving it and the finally, ending off his exhausting day with the discovery of his possession of a rare magical gift.

Would his life ever be peaceful? Harry thought idly as he lay in bed, not wanting to get up.

Half an hour later, Harry reluctantly dragged himself out of his bed and decided to go to the Library before going down for lunch. He knew breakfast was already over, by the looks of it, even lunch was approaching. Maybe a bit of light reading would be good before breakfast. Harry grinned at the thought of being back with his dusty

old books, alone in the big Library with no company but the ancient knowledge of books he so thirsted after.

However, when Harry arrived at the Library, he realized that it was not empty like he expected. A lone figure lay at the couch towards the side of the library, and grey eyes stared into space, looking bored and haughty that only a pureblood could achieve without overdoing it.

The figure paid no heed to Harry when he walked into the Library although Harry was sure that he wasn't exactly quiet and gracefully elegant like the way the pompous pureblood witches and wizards often walked, or a better term, strutted around.

"Draco?" Harry said in disbelief as he halted in his tracks. How could the Malfoy Heir ever come to the Library?

Draco huffed a little and cast a glance at Harry, at the same time throwing down the copy of the morning's Daily Prophet onto the couch as he finally looked up to catch Harry's eye.

"What are you doing here, in the Library?" Harry blurted out without thinking. It seemed absurd that Draco would ever step a foot into the Library.

Draco looked angry for a second before he composed his face into an unreadable mask. "If I remember correctly," he drawled like his father, "This is the Malfoy Library."

Harry blinked. "Well, yes. But you don't exactly come to the Library right?"

"I figured that if you were anywhere, it would be the Library," Draco said, scowling.

"Oh."

Draco ignored him as he stood up and advanced to Harry. It was an amusing sight to see the young Heir almost abandoning his graceful strut to stomp towards Harry, who stood his ground watching Draco warily.

"Harry Lestrangle? Harry Lestrangle?" Draco started and Harry looked bemused.

"Since when was the Dark Lord a Lestrangle? You're the bloody Dark Heir! The Dark Lord's heir!" Draco's voice rose shrilly as he yelled at Harry.

"Well... I suppose I might've lied about that part a little," Harry said slowly.

"A little? A little?" Draco said in disbelief. "The Dark Heir, Harry! You're the Dark Heir and you never told me!" Draco continued shrilly which might have looked funny if not for the fact that someone might overhear him.

"I've only met you once!" Harry protested. "And father said I wasn't allowed to disclose who I was. Are you implying for me to go against the Dark Lord's wishes?"

Draco's eyes widened almost comically. "Of course not! The Dark Lord's word is law. Everyone knows that."

Harry shrugged. "Then that's settled. And you don't go off blabbering about the Dark Heir to your ... friends. I might be the Dark Heir and all, but I can't save you from a few rounds of crucios. It hurts you know? Drives you crazy with pain."

"What was it like?" Draco's voice was suddenly reduced to a whisper.

"What was what?" Harry asked curiously.

"The Cruciatus Curse of course!" Draco burst out. "What was Aunt Bella's crucio like? I've heard countless stories of it and how people went insane because of it... how was it?"

Harry stared at Draco incredulously. "You're joking right?" he said. "You're asking me what Aunt Bella's crucio was like? You're kidding me. Of course it hurts!"

"Oh yeah, I forgotten I guess," Draco said and Harry cast another bemused look at Draco. "But look at what the prophet's written about you!" he said quickly. "Not you of course, but the Dark Heir, which is

you, well, kind of, except they don't know who the Dark Heir really is."

Harry chanced a glance at the prophet, its headlines glaring out at him.

He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named Has an Heir!

Below the huge headlines was a highly coloured photo of the scene at Diagon Alley, which showed Lily Potter casting the Avada Kedavra to Bellatrix while Harry dove towards her, shielding her by the impact. The photo went onto show Harry being blasted into the air in a blinding green light, finally ending with the golden thread emerging from Lily's wand.

Harry quickly skimmed through the Prophet, taking note of the reporter's tone. 'The Boy Who Lived' the prophet had decided to termed him. The only one who survived the killing curse was the Dark Heir! For the next two pages, the prophet went onto describe Harry and Voldemort, mainly on their conversation with Dumbledore and the dramatic revelation of Harry's existence.

It finally ended off with another dramatic note, saying "The Dark Heir is a force to be reckoned with, if he could survive the killing curse at such a young age. Witches and wizards of Wizarding Britain must now fear He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, for even if the Light does vanquish him, his Heir would surely be the next Dark Lord. One can only hope that the Chosen One would be able to handle the two Dark Lords."

"Rita Skeeter," Harry said after he turned the last page of the paper on the battle at Diagon Alley. "She's the one who wrote about my disappearance too."

"Disappearance?" Draco said confusedly and Harry suddenly remembered that Draco didn't know that he was a Potter. Or Harry Potter for that matter.

"I meant, there was once I disappeared from the manor..." Harry said lamely which didn't fit as an excuse but Draco didn't seem to notice.

"Oh what?" Draco said. "Oh right. Yeah, her, Skeeter. Half blood, Muggle mother. She's always snipping around for more gossips. You can basically imagine how the rest of the wizarding world is panicking now. 'The Boy Who Lived' is the Dark Heir, the Dark Lord's heir and everything."

"They didn't say anything about mo- I mean, Lily casting the Unforgivable though," Harry noted as he flipped the prophet. "It was mostly about myself being a hero to push Aunt Bella out of the way and the fact that I was not such a good hero, since I work for the Dark side after all."

"I bet Dumbledore hushed it up," Draco said dismissively. "He's always doing that, for years with all his manipulations for all of his Order. If it weren't for him, half the Order would be in Azkaban for their illegal curses. Did you see the gash on Father's left arm yesterday? It was a Dark Curse, yet the person from the Order wasn't even charged!

Everyone on the Dark side knows about Dumbledore and his authority over the dimwitted Minister, but how he keeps his true nature behind that twinkling blue eyes of his and his grandfatherly look? Anyway, Father told me that the mudblood didn't even get a trial! Got off, without charges! Well I suppose it helps that the person she was casting the curse to is Bellatrix Lestrange though, second most wanted person in Wizarding Britain."

Harry shrugged. "I suppose."

Draco's eyes lit up suddenly. "Hey do you want to go down to the grounds for a game of Quidditch?"

"No thanks," Harry said quickly. "I've learned my lesson."

Draco sighed but then a distraction cut across his silence.

"Draco! Draco! Hey Malfoy!"

Two loud voices rang through the Library as two pairs of feet ran towards the direction of Harry and Draco, both who turned towards the intruding voice.

"Malfoy!"

A large, rounded boy stopped to pant as he reached Draco who looked at him in disgust. "Crabbe. Goyle. What are you two doing here? This is not the kitchens you know?" Draco added in sarcasm.

"No, Draco! Did you see the prophet? The Dark Lord has an heir! An heir! And Goyle thought that it might be you!" Crabbe started off excitedly, waving his copy of the prophet in the air. "We figured that you would be the only possible person! And this morning, we rushed off from the floo to come find you, then the elf said that you were in the Library. The Library!" Crabbe rushed on, without noting the presence of Harry in his excitement.

Draco looked horrified at Crabbe's proclamation and turned towards Harry, before saying coolly, "In case you two goons haven't noticed, I do not have black hair. Nor do I have green eyes. My eyes are grey, Crabbe."

"But it might have been a disguise! A disguise of course!" Goyle interjected quickly, sounding as though he was making an important discovery of note.

Draco gave a loud, great sigh as he turned towards Harry who smirked.

"Do you two, ever use your eyes to see? Look at who's standing next to me, look, and look closely," Draco said slowly, as though he was speaking to two trolls.

Crabbe and Goyle turned towards Harry, still panting out of breath, and their gormless faces immediately turned to one of surprise and dimwitted shock.

"Oh." Crabbe said.

"This," Draco said, with a dramatic pause. "Is the Dark Heir!"

Crabbe and Goyle scrutinized Harry closely before letting out choking splutters simultaneously and pointed at Harry.

Harry heaved a great sigh. "Draco," he said through his gritted teeth. "Didn't I say not to tell them anything?"

Draco looked terrified at his mistake and gasped, not knowing how to react.

Harry pulled out his wand and muttered "obliviate" at the two boys.

"A memory charm? That's supposed to be really, really advanced!" Draco gushed.

"I know," Harry said heavily as he turned to Crabbe and Goyle who looked slightly dazed. "They wouldn't recognize me though, in a few years. The Blood Ritual I took with the Dark Lord takes time to take effect, really. Now I look more of ... myself but when the years pass, it would be more of a mixture. Not that it isn't now, but it would be, slightly more...so I don't think anyone would recognize me anyway."

"You took a Blood Ritual with the Dark Lord?"

"Yeah, I am his, adopted son, or some sort. Heir would be a better word I suppose," Harry chanced a glance at Crabbe and Goyle who still looked confused.

"I better go now. It's nearly time for lunch anyway. And make sure you don't bring this two," Harry indicated Crabbe and Goyle, "along with you, especially into the Library. I wouldn't be seeing you too often I guess, I'm limited to certain parts of the Manor only, where the Death Eaters cannot go, but why you can... Well, it's the Malfoy Manor so it's not surprising that you can enter the restricted and warded parts of the Manor while others can't."

Draco looked as though he wasn't listening to Harry while he attempted to jerk Crabbe and Goyle out of their daze.

"That will pass," Harry said to Draco, before grinning apologetically. "I think I overdid it, it was my first time and I wasn't too sure on how to do it. Well, see you then."

Without waiting for Draco's late reply, Harry walked out of the Library before going down to the Dining Area which only the Dark Lord and a selected few people could enter. He didn't get the chance to do his bit of light reading which he originally planned, but that would come later.

And Rita Skeeter was starting to get on his nerves.

Author's Notes

Several important things to clear up, questions mostly. Alright, so one by one. I'll do this every few chapters if there are questions posted by my reviewers. And thank you to EVERYONE who reviewed, whether long or short, I appreciate it all the same.

1. This story is not HPLV slash, so, yeah. I don't really know how to write them, so I figured for my first story, best to try stick with the original idea I had, though the story line keeps expanding and I add in new ideas every few days.

2. What spell did Voldemort hit Harry with? That is explained a little in the previous chapters, but it would be further elaborated on in one of my later chapters. All that I can say now is that, the spell would affect Harry's personality, and no, it's not an Obliviate, but something along the lines of Obliviate, except it isn't memory he is erasing.

3. Will Harry go back to the Light? Well, no. This story won't end off with Harry forgiving his parents and everything and especially his brother, but of course, the Dark side cannot take over wizarding Britain with their current views. Some of their stand would change a little, such as their take with muggleborns because it needs to be a realistic win for them, and not just solely based on power.

4. Harry's magical gift. It is mainly used to absorb spells, but it can also absorb the magic within witches and wizards, though it's main uses for Harry is to absorb the Killing Curse. I can't see Harry absorbing people's magic for he's own benefit (unless it's someone evil). Voldemort, is an entirely different matter, and as many might have guessed, yes, he will definitely make use of the spell and absorb Dumbledore's if he had the chance to.

5. Harry would be going to Durmstrang, based on the poll + review results.

6. There would be a time skip in the next chapter, so don't be confused!

7. Harry and Remus. That would be explained in the next chapter as well, part of the story line I originally planned out. I am considering

for Remus to join the Dark side, not as a Death Eater though. Werewolves are naturally dark creatures, and Dumbledore... well the Dumbledore in my story isn't that grandfatherly and I see him as making use of Remus with his werewolf condition to get the Werewolves over to their side, so there is a chance that Remus would turn to the Dark side, especially with Lily and James.

So this ends off my chapter! I have about a month of holidays left before I go off to Sec 2, a whole new year. I'll try to update more during this few weeks though although I'm not going overseas anymore, I have a couple of hours of school Community Service Programme to clear as well, so that will also take up some of my time.

And again, THANK YOU to EVERYONE who took the time and reviewed!

7. Werewolf Alliance

Time Skip, 10 years.

"Expelliarmus! Stupefy! Incendio!"

Three jets of light flashed through the room, like arrows aiming for a single spot where a tall figure stood. The light illuminated the windows and a second later, a crater burst open to the left of the teenager, who immediately dodged and rolled to his right.

"Strapsido!" said the teen, almost lazily as he slashed his wand down like a sword. "Lecrucix! Excrutso!"

The blond man opposite him who he was dueling with was forced to abandon the incantation he had been casting and dove aside, crashing onto the floor messily as he quickly sent back another curse which the teen deflected easily.

"You can do better than that," the teen said mockingly even as he sent back another curse which came into contact with the blond man who was promptly thrown backwards to the wall with a spinning headache.

Lucius Malfoy sighed internally as he wearily stood up from the floor, his wand held tight in his hand as he tried to outwit the teen he was dueling with. Speed, knowledge and curses – neither of which he could surpass his opponent. It was no use; Harrison was just too fast for him, the curses rolled off him easily and quickly as though each movement, each curse were choreographed.

Over the years, Harry had grown a lot indeed, and Lucius often felt that he was in several more ways apart from his looks that were similar to the Dark Lord. Both had similar dueling skills, – though it was not surprising seeing that the Dark Lord had personally coached Harry in his third year and beyond – preferring to attack rather than defend and were always on the move during a duel. Their defense consisted of moving, dodging, but not blocking.

It made sense though, Lucius thought. There are curses which shield charms would not work against. Yet, by dodging, any curses could be avoided, even the Unforgivables. Yet most wizards and witches did not have the reflexes required for dodging successfully.

"Sectum-!" he began but the teen vanished before his eyes, reappearing a second later behind him, giving him no chance to defend himself. Even as he raised his wand, Harry's non verbal spell had caused it to fly back across the room, landing with a loud clatter as it rolled on the floor to a standstill.

Harry smirked as he pointed his wand to Lucius's neck. It was really too easy to win a duel with Lucius once you got to know him further. Each of his moves were predictable, his attack and defense were really on the same lines.

"I win," he said in a loud clear voice, however his win was short lived.

A second later, the door to the Duelling Room burst open and a jet of bright orange light flashed towards Harry who immediately pushed himself and Lucius out of the way. Two more jets of light followed to the space where Harry had stood only so recently.

"Expulso!" Harry snarled, pointing his wand toward the floor, creating a large explosion in between. How many times had he told Bellatrix to quit scaring him after he was done with dueling with Lucius? Apparently she didn't take heed of his words.

"Oh he certainly knows how to play!" came the loud voice of one Bellatrix Lestrangle who stepped into the room, raising her wand. The Dark Lord stood beside her, watching the duel take place between his heir and his second in command as Lucius walked forward to join him, having recognized that his battle was over and a new one was taking place, though he looked disgruntled by the fact that Harry had won yet again.

Harry poised himself, ready for the duel. He almost nearly sighed when Bellatrix wasted no more time in 'pleasantries curses' and quickly fired off her signature curse – the Cruciatus Curse. Having used it before, Harry could understand why the Cruciatus Curse was so popular in the wide rang torture curse – it gave the caster a huge sense of power, dark power that seem to sing to them yet it did not appeal much to him, usually.

Not bothering to defend himself, Harry rolled out of the way and took the chance to fire back more curses at her, all of which were steadily becoming more illegal and dark. His aura was flaring around him

whenever a particularly nasty curse was used, yet he didn't seem to notice.

Jets of light flew across the room as the two dueled. It was no child's duel, it was the type of duel that one would probably see in a battle between the Order and the Death Eaters. Neither were losing, but Harry was clearly gaining the upper hand as he wove and ducked around Bellatrix's curses effortlessly, taking time to pause as he surveyed the battle scene playing before his eyes. It was clear that he was biding his time and playing with Bellatrix.

Twice, he halted to give Bellatrix time to recover. However, Bellatrix continued to cast the Unforgivable which made Harry irritated. Bellatrix always seemed to forget who she was dueling with. He wasn't some Order person and this was a supposedly friendly duel. He wasn't one to complain, but the Crucio did hurt quite a lot.

"Crucio!" Bellatrix snarled, brandishing her wand as the jet missed Harry, who stopped in his incantation.

"You ought to change curses once in a while," Harry laughed with ease as he deflected Bellatrix's spell before casting another one non-verbally.

"Harry!" screeched Bellatrix as her elaborate long flowing black robes were set on fire. "Aguamenti!" she bawled at her robes which immediately became soaked with water, weighing her movements down.

Harry thought he heard an amused chuckle coming from his father and he remembered that his father had come along with Bellatrix. He hastened to end the duel.

"Imperio!" this was the one Unforgivable that he did not mind using.

Bellatrix stiffened as she was hit with the Imperius Curse.

Harry walked forward towards her. "What should I make you do, Aunt Bella? In repayment for the Crucios?" he said in a solemn tone, giving his wand a flick and causing Bellatrix to run towards his father, bending down to kiss his robes like she and the Death Eaters always did in Death Eater meetings, only this time it wasn't by her will.

However, Harry was not done with her, as far as Voldemort could see. Instead of retreating from him, Bellatrix turned to Lucius instead and did the same thing to him, kneeling and kissing the hem of his robes like he was her master, causing Harry to choke with laughter and himself to press his lips firmly in order to prevent himself from chuckling.

There was no bloody way that Bellatrix would ever do that without being under the influence of the Imperius Curse.

With another flick of his wand, Harry released the curse.

Horried, the now-sane Bellatrix immediately stood up as she looked into the laughing eyes of Malfoy. "Harry!" she snarled quite very angry, moving forward to curse him but the high cold voice of Voldemort interrupted.

"Enough."

Silence fell onto the room for a moment.

"Father," Harry acknowledged, turning to Lord Voldemort, who nodded with a pleased smile on his face.

"A rather, interesting duel you have here," Voldemort said. "Two of my best Death Eaters in the Inner Circle who cannot defeat a teen in a duel," Voldemort drawled and both Lucius and Bellatrix stiffened in fright, as though scared that they would be punished for their incompetence, causing Harry to smirk.

Now sixteen years old, ten years since he had ran away from the Potters and join Lord Voldemort, Harry had changed quite a lot from his childhood years. The once sad and unsure child had grew into one that was brave, cunning and intelligent, quite like Tom Riddle when he was at Hogwarts.

Most of the remainders of his life at the Potter manor had been erased; since living with Voldemort, Harry had a much more active life, consisting mainly of his training with Lucius and Bellatrix, as well as the occasional Quidditch matches with Draco, whenever the young Malfoy heir was granted permission to visit him at the Riddle Manor.

Apart from the intense green eyes and messy black hair that remained, Harry was just like Voldemort in physical aspects. He was also talented in knowing how to manipulate those around him to do his wishes and his alluring aura just added on to it, drawing people close to him, yet they did not know why they all loved to be around him.

His only one appearance as the Dark Heir since he was six had been in the previous summer, when Voldemort finally decided that Harry's existence should be reminded in the Wizarding World. Dumbledore had continued his speeches about how he was less of a threat to Wizarding Britain and on many occasions, assured the witches and wizards of their safety because 'Lord Voldemort has changed his policy and is now taking a more active approach in various other aspects rather than to go on riots, killing muggles and muggleborns alike.'

At that time, there was a senior witch in the Ministry of Magic that posed quite a bit of problem to Voldemort's reign for she was a gifted witch whose opinion was valued. She was strongly against the Dark Arts and was singing in tune with Dumbledore. She often tried to impose new rules regarding the Dark Arts, many of which were approved due to her influence within the Wizengamot and Dumbledore's firm backing behind her.

The latest rule that had all Dark Pureblood families submit their wands for a search of recent activity of illegal and dark curses had caused many prominent members of the Inner Circle's last and very final straw to snap, each one highly abusing the Ministry witch and plotting of ways to discredit her, if not kill her. The rumor had reached their Lord's ears and decided to send Harry to dispose of her, to prove his capabilities and remind the world that he had not indeed, as Dumbledore put it, 'gone soft' or 'developed a conscience after all these years'.

True, he had absorbed all his souls from the Horcruxes, but one remained. The soul in the Slytherin's locket remained and he carried it with him everywhere he went, inside his robes. With it, neither him or Harry could die. Harry was tied to him after the Blood Ritual, and only if his Horcrux was destroyed would Harry begin to age after seventeen.

It was short and quick, a flash of green light and the witch was dead without any trouble. How she was thought to be a gifted witch, Harry was bewildered and felt slightly cheated for all his anticipation for a good fight went down the drain. He knew that the witch wouldn't last in a duel for five minutes against Lucius or Bellatrix.

Harry went alone, and was long gone before any of the Aurors had arrived, although he had refused to disclose how he had dismantled all of the wards in the house and made the house anti-apparation and kill the witch in such a short time for it usually took a team of two or three to do it.

That murder was all over the Prophet for several days, speculating that the murder had been done by Voldemort himself for Amelia Bones was a very gifted witch and there was no sign of a fight being put up, showing that she was murdered without the chance to defend herself.

However, word had spread throughout the Inner Circle and eventually passed onto the wizard community – no doubt by Bellatrix who started it– that it was the work of the Dark Heir, Voldemort's son, leaving the witches and wizards panicking as though they might be the next on the list of people being attacked. They had not really forgotten how the Dark Heir was the 'boy who lived', but rather, put it at the back of their minds. The Dark Heir soon became the newest topic for gossip, not that anyone dared to do it in public.

The world had dismissed the presence Dark Heir for he never once appeared in the Britain since he was hit by the Killing Curse. Rumors flew that the Heir had indeed died of the curse several hours later which explained his sudden disappearance and eventually, the Heir became a person of the past, hidden in the sub consciousness of the people.

Dumbledore made efforts to try to locate the Dark Heir but Voldemort immediately moved him to the Riddle Manor two days after the incident. Riddle Manor was protected by the fidelus charm, and Voldemort was the secret keeper so Dumbledore was not much closer to locating the Dark Heir than locating Voldemort.

"Nevertheless," Voldemort's voice came again. "It is understood that Harry," he threw Harry a look of pride, "is not your mere teen."

Harry felt as though his heart soared at these words. Not a mere teen, Voldemort had said. He knew this of course, but it still felt nice to hear it for once. Voldemort wasn't big on giving out praises. Torturing was more of his forte. To know that he was being praised by the Dark Lord was kind of an honor to him, since what he wanted was approval from Voldemort.

Harry nodded, trying to stop the smile from spreading across his face while an amused smirk flashed across Voldemort's face when he caught the look on his heir's face.

"I have a mission for you, Harry," Voldemort continued and Harry became alert at once. A mission? He hoped that he wasn't sent off somewhere else to kill another meddling old fool from the Ministry. They were a waste of time even if there was a need to dispose of them. "We have of course, changed our policy for the Wizarding World yet much needs to be done still. In order to secure the Ministry's trust over our side of the war, we need to gain alliances."

Harry nodded. He had been studying the first war between Dumbledore and Grindelwald and knew that the partial reason why Dumbledore had won was because of the popular support he had. "You would be looking at Vampires, Dementors, Giants, the likes then?" His voice sounded curious.

"And Werewolves!" cackled Bellatrix from behind Harry, her voice full of mirth. "We cannot do with those savage creatures. Greyback would be useful to our cause," she sneered, missing the way that Harry stiffened at the word Werewolves.

Voldemort, however, did not miss Harry's sudden rigidness. Although he did not know the full story of Harry's pensive, he had the general idea of it. Weeks of persuasion had finally pushed the young Harry to confide within Voldemort on his childhood. Harry was unusually vague in the topic of Lupin, and Voldemort knew that the werewolf was probably Harry's only friend at Godric's Hollow and Harry was unwilling to talk about him.

And Harry looked as though he would have liked to curse Bellatrix on her take of werewolves and hastened to interrupt in the situation. While the young Harry could not do much damage that Bellatrix couldn't handle, the teenage Harry could.

"Which is precisely the task that I want you to accomplish."

Harry looked puzzled. "You want me to negotiate an alliance with the werewolves?" The Dark Lord wanted him, to negotiate such an important alliance? How could it be, he wasn't even of age for one thing. But he felt honored that Voldemort trusted him. Trust was not easy in Voldemort's life; it was earned after serving him for a long time.

Voldemort looked pleased with Harry's answer. "Yes, Harry, I want you to negotiate an alliance with the werewolves. You are more than qualified in that position as my Heir. I believe it is also to your advantage to have a more active participation in the current war."

Harry's eyes met Voldemort's and saw the belief in Voldemort's eyes. "I will not fail you, father," his words rang clearly around the room and he held his head high, his determination to succeed clear for all to see. He would not disgrace his Father, he promised. He would be Voldemort's perfect heir, he would show Voldemort that he could be trusted...

But little did he know that Voldemort already knew and trusted him. Voldemort was horrified when he first realized that he actually trusted Harry – he did not trust anyone after all! – but over the years he came to understand that the trust he had within Harry was irreplaceable for he knew the one person Harry would not betray would be himself.

"I know you won't," Voldemort echoed. "You will be going later this afternoon, together with Bellatrix. The Portkey is with Bellatrix, and you will do well to remember that Greyback is not one to mess with. He might not be magically strong, but he is a threat if you become his target. He has hundreds of werewolves under his command, poised to attack at his command."

"That Half-blood, a threat?" snorted Bellatrix disdainfully and Voldemort instantly turned to glare at her slowly and she cowered under his piercing, watchful gaze.

"The very same Half-blood who happens to control and dominate all the werewolves, not only in Britain, but the rest of the Wizarding World," Harry said very quietly. He was never one to estimate anyone.

"It will be beneficial to you, Bella, if you were to watch your words under their presence," Voldemort continued coldly as his finger twirled with his wand, as though deciding which curse to use at Bellatrix. Bellatrix eyed the wand, her look of disdain being replaced by a terrified expression.

"Father, I'm sure Bellatrix has learned her lesson," Harry quickly said. He did not want to see Bellatrix under the Cruciatus curse nor any other Dark curse. He might have disagreed with several of Bellatrix's views, but he still regarded her as something close to a mother-figure in all these years at the Riddle and Malfoy Manors and he had grown close to her – perhaps closer than he was to Lily. Bellatrix might also fire Crucios at him during their duel, but he knew that she did not really mean it.

And the Crucio needed the caster to mean it for it to work.

"She would not say the wrong thing later, I'm sure of it," he cast a glance at Bellatrix and smirked.

Voldemort's glare settled at Harry before his eyes softened and he calmed. "For now," he said, effectively ending the discussion between them. "Bellatrix, you may leave with Lucius."

Bellatrix hurriedly bowed and left the room, but not before throwing Harry a grateful glance and Harry smiled in return though he was snickering on the inside at Bellatrix's fear of Voldemort. To him, Voldemort really wasn't all that scary; at times Voldemort even treated him Harry as his equal and asked for his opinions.

Once they left, Voldemort turned to him and he remembered of his task once more and sighed quietly. He would have to face Remus later for he was still with the wolves, he thought with dread. What would Remus think of him? Would Remus despise him now, like Lily and James did, because he joined the Dark side?

"Harry, you understand why I asked you to negotiate an alliance with the werewolves? Apart from the reason I stated, do you know why I chose you, to go forth?" Voldemort said slowly, his eyes watching Harry's face for a reaction.

Hesitantly, Harry bowed his head.

"You cannot keep running away from your past, Harry," Voldemort's voice was low now. "In order to face your family who thought you were nothing compared to the Chosen One, you must first overcome yourself."

"But how can I go and face him? Face Remus with the wolves?" Harry's voice was broken suddenly. "What would he say if he knew that I turned to the Dark and was your Heir? The famous Dark Heir, the Boy-Who-Lived and all the rubbish! He belongs to the Light through and through. He is far too manipulated by Dumbledore. He was the only friend I had!" All his frustration came pouring out as he ranted to Voldemort like he always did when he was angry.

"Harry, I'm not asking you to cut off your ties with Lupin," Voldemort's voice was urgent and a glimpse of hope flashed past Harry's eyes. Was Voldemort serious? He knew that if he had to choose between Voldemort and Remus, he would no doubt choose Voldemort. Beyond the gratitude that he owed Voldemort for what he was today, Voldemort was the only person he could relate to and Harry could not imagine his life without Voldemort. But Remus... Remus had been the one who gave him support during his life with the Potters. He could not... he couldn't.

"Really?" Harry was aware how childish he sounded. Voldemort never broke his word and it seemed foolish to question it. "I meant, I know you won't break your word, but why would you not want me to cut of my friendship with him? He, Remus, he belongs to the Light. But – wait – is there any chance of bringing him over to the Dark side?" hope rang in his voice, perhaps there was, he thought.

A slim chance... it had to be there.

"That lies in you, Harry," Voldemort said calmly. "I am aware that Lupin has not been very tolerant of your parents these days. Their contact is negligent. His faith in Dumbledore is wavering but he will not accept himself as a member of the Dark side. Ever since he became a Dark creature, he has been trying hard to not let himself be consumed by the Darkness, to prove that he is loyal to the Light." A shadow of dismay settled on Harry's face.

"There's no hope then? Would I have to face him at the opposite side of the war? Father, I could never betray you, but I can't – he

was my first friend," panic was visible in Harry's voice and he struggled to keep his voice in check.

Now Voldemort looked slightly alarmed at Harry. He never realized that Harry would be that worked up.

"You could convince him to remain neutral in the war?" he offered. "Persuade him, show him the manipulations of Albus Dumbledore and convince him to be neutral."

"Persuade him...?" Harry's voice was cracked. He looked to Voldemort for support and the Dark Lord immediately nodded in a reassuring way and he felt his nerves calm. Yes, it was possible, he told himself. There had to be a chance, if his Father asked him to try. Yes, it was possible.

"Thank you Father," he whispered. "I will not fail you. We will gain the alliance of the wolves," he promised.

That was what he could do for Voldemort. He owed Voldemort a lot. His life revolved around Voldemort and he shuddered to think what his life would have been if he had not made the choice to join Voldemort when he was six. No doubt, he would still be under the thumb of Joshua. His life had gone better than expected and he was immensely thankful for that.

Voldemort smiled. "You have never failed me, Harry."

Harry's heart soared once more despite his over reactive emotions concerning Remus and this time, he could not help the silly grin that appeared on his face. Really, how was it possible that his father always knew how to cheer him up when others - including his friends - could not?

A loud sigh was heaved.

Harrison Riddle stood in front of his wardrobe, his face hesitant as he trailed his hands over the many pieces of expensive silk. Slowly, he picked a simple yet elegant piece of long black robe before grabbing his silver-white Death Eater Mask. Unlike the rest of the Death Eaters, his mask did not cover his whole face. It merely covered the top of his face, right up to the bridge of his nose. Even the Inner Circle did not have this ... privilege. It was to highlight

Harry's superiority compared to the rest of Voldemort's minions. And to show that he was the closest thing to an equal that Voldemort would ever allow.

Turning towards, the full-length mirror, Harry surveyed himself from it. He tried to see if he was recognizable beneath the mask, hoping that Remus would not be able to recognize him. After a long time thinking, he decided that it would be preferable if he was not recognized. He needed more time to prepare – how was he going to say that he betrayed his family?

The clock slowly ticked towards twelve and Harry sighed internally, recognizing that his presence was needed. He finally decided that it was the best he could do and there was no point worrying any more. Harry chanced a glance at the mirror once more. The vivid green eyes stared back at him for a second and he thought that was the only thing of him that was recognizable.

He could never erase Lily Evans from his life, could he?

"This, this is the place?" sneered the loud voice of Bellatrix Lestrange. Harry straightened up gracefully, his expression carefully controlled even though he had his mask on; his were eyes scanning the underground building.

"The great Fenrir Greyback lives here?" scoffed Bellatrix disdainfully. "He could have done better."

The place was dark and cold, like a dungeon, only that it was far bigger than that. It looked like a long corridor, the walls and floor a jet black and doors stood at the walls at irregular intervals, leading to several other rooms, all of which were closed and some were occupied as far as Harry could tell. The occupants of the room were making very loud and distracting noises and Harry wondered if the wolves even knew how to cast a silencing charm.

A single desk stood at the rear of the room, next to a rusty old lift. Sitting behind the desk was a young lady – a muggle. She looked up to Bellatrix and Harry and smiled warmly as she ruffled through a stack of papers and beckoned them to come closer.

"You must be Madam Lestrangle and Mister Riddle," the muggle said warmly when Harry and Bellatrix stood behind the desk, Bellatrix wary.

Bellatrix turned to the muggle and sneered. "A muggle," she scoffed. "A muggle as a receptionist? How highly convenient, should that filthy wolf ever have an urge for human flesh."

The muggle only smiled further and ignored Bellatrix's words. "I'm Nelisa," she introduced and held out her hand for a handshake. Bellatrix looked down at her in disgust, sneering as she pulled out her wand. Harry quickly put a restraining hand on her.

"Later," he said slowly, earning a glare from Bellatrix but the next moment, he turned and smiled at Nelisa – a reassuring smile.

"We are here on the invitation of Greyback," he said and Nelisa nodded.

"He is expecting you in Room 4," Nelisa informed and gestured to one of the rooms which the corridor led to. Harry followed her gaze.

Nelisa hesitated for a second and seemed as though she was unsure if she should say something. Harry gave her another encouraging smile like how he always saw his father do it and Nelisa said slowly, "I should tell you, that his second in command is also in there. And he does not take kindly to visitors or the Dark side. But nevertheless, he is in the position because of his influence and his magical power. And... he comes from a Light family."

Harry thanked her quietly, earning himself another glare from Bellatrix. He considered the information. A Light Family? That was unheard of. He was surprised that Greyback would allow the wolf to stay, much less as his second in command.

Then he sighed when he saw Bellatrix tapping her wand impatiently. Bellatrix should really know that Greyback would have a reason for Nelisa as his receptionist and it was best not to curse anyone in the enemy's territory. Even he didn't know how many wolves resided in this place and there could easily be a hundred.

Walking with ease, he approached the Room 4. The door swung open at his approach and Bellatrix fell back behind him automatically, respecting his status as the Dark Heir.

Harry scanned the room quickly and noted that it was a simple meeting room, with a large table and chairs surrounding it. Sitting at the head of the table was Greyback himself, in an elaborate suit of black and silver. To his right was ...

Harry's eyes widened in shock and he quickly masked the surprise that flashed across his face before he plastered a composing smile. Almost simultaneously, the second-in-command stiffened ever so slightly, then a slightly puzzled and confused look settled on his face.

"Ahh, the renowned Dark Heir," Greyback said in welcome albeit slightly mockingly and he stood up, striding over to where Harry and Bellatrix stood in mere seconds.

"The very same," Harry flashed a smirk, turning away from Greyback's second in command who oddly, did not stand but remained seated with a confused look.

"Take a seat," Greyback invited, gesturing to the seats at the front. "I'm sure the Dark Lord would not be pleased if I let his heir stand throughout the meeting, will he?"

Harry nodded coldly and moved over, choosing to sit nearer to Greyback as opposed to Greyback's second in command who now looked at him suspiciously.

"My second in command," Greyback said casually once he sat down.

The figure bowed his head slowly, not taking his eyes off Harry who avoided eye contact. Harry cursed in his head. Damn, why didn't he think of putting a glamour over his eyes? He usually put a glamour to his eyes when he went to school and now that he thought of it, the intense green was a dead giveaway. Anyone who knew Lily Evans close enough would no doubt recognize it. And sure, the Second In Command definitely knew her.

Could life get any worse? Wait, Harry thought. Scratch that last. Could his life get any worse?

"Remus Lupin," Greyback's second in command introduced and hesitated for a fraction of a second. He still hadn't take his eyes of Harry.

Harry smiled, trying not to show his horror at being in the same room as Remus. They hadn't seen each other for ten years after all. This was not the reunion he expected. He needed to stay calm, there was no way Remus could know who he was. Just stay calm, he told himself. Just, stay, calm.

"Pleasure," he forced himself to reply with another smirk.

Remus did not smile but inclined his head once more. "Perhaps," he added with a look to Greyback. "it would be prudent for you to take off your mask?" he said slowly. "Trust is important in an alliance. We need to know who we are facing and allying with."

It was a good thing that Harry wore a mask for the expression behind it betrayed him. It was one of utmost horror. How was he going to get out of this? He was doomed, he was doomed. He might not be the carbon copy of James Potter any more but werewolves had sharper senses than an average witch and wizard and he knew Remus would be more than capable to spot the hidden similarities between himself and James. He was doomed.

"Watch your words, wolf!" Bellatrix snarled and she stood up, her wand aimed at Remus. The tip of it was sparking red sparks, the very same color of the Cruciatus Curse. "Who are you, you filthy half breed to command the Dark Heir?"

Remus remained calm, but his eyes went to Harry, silently challenging. Amber eyes met green eyes and Harry sat stock still for a moment.

Harry silently thanked Bellatrix for the outburst in his head, but after his staring game with Remus, he hastily stood up to restrain her. He did not need any casualties. He wanted to do this properly for his father. And he would not let Bellatrix ruin it. And what more, he did not want Remus under the Cruciatus Curse.

"Enough," he said warningly to Bellatrix who did not relent but merely clutched her wand tighter in her hand. "Stop," he let the authority seep into his words and Bellatrix slowly sat. "Now."

Greyback watched the interaction between Harry and Bellatrix. Interesting... To see the powerful and vicious Bellatrix Lestrange under the authority of the Dark Heir and she did not seem insulted. To the best of his knowledge, Bellatrix respected only the Dark Heir, not even Lucius Malfoy did she respect. But the Dark Heir...

Harry turned gave a placating smile to Remus. His brain was whirring. How does one manipulate their way out of this?

Nevertheless, he began, "Of course, you need to know," he paused and turned to flash another smile at Greyback who looked pleased. "However, the Dark Lord prefers that the identity of his Heir is not known to the Wizarding World as of yet. Precaution is needed, and while we do indeed trust," he made eye contact with Greyback at these words. "your pack, there are much magical means to force one to spill their deepest secrets."

He paused, and let his words take effect. It seemed as though Greyback was influenced. Yet Remus... he was merely staring him down intently.

"Such as, Legimency, Veritaserum and the Imperius Curse," he continued and was pleased to see Greyback nodding thoughtfully and smirked inwardly. The power of manipulating one's words knows no boundary, he thought smugly. He might not be as skilled as his father but he was talented enough. "Which, is the reason for our insistence that I do not reveal my identity even though, as I have reassured you, we do indeed trust your pack, Fenrir and –"

"We can swear an Unbreakable Vow," Remus interrupted quietly. Greyback's eyes turned towards him before turning back to Harry, questions evident in his eye.

"An Unbreakable Vow ensures that one is unable to spill their secrets by any magical form, protecting their mind and knowledge for intruders," Remus said, sounding extremely researched. Harry's heart thumped quickly and Remus continued, "I for one, would be willing to swear the Unbreakable Vow to know the Dark Heir's identity."

"As do I," Greyback flashed what he thought was a nice smile at Harry. "I would love to see who you are, my little Dark Heir. Such power at your age..." his voice trailed off. "Pity your magic..." He flashed another smile, this time, it was slightly mocking.

Harry froze inwardly while maintaining a calm mask. The alliance, yet his identity was at stake. He couldn't risk it... he couldn't. At last, he spoke up, "We would invite you to the Inner Circle meeting where by I disclose my identity to the rest of the selected few of the Inner Circle. You would swear the Unbreakable Vow then, and know of my identity along with the selected few," Greyback did not move. His eyes were hard as he stared daggers into the young Heir before him. His smile froze in space but his eyes were cold.

"It is the furthest we would go to." Harry finished.

He paused there for a dramatic effect. He waited for the Alpha wolf to speak, silently challenging him. The unspoken threat was layered beneath his cunningly crafted words. Anyone with a brain would know that should Greyback demand more, Voldemort was going to pay him a visit. And a visit that was not going to be ... very friendly.

Carefully, he avoided Remus's gaze and stared down Greyback, not flinching under the wolf's amber gaze. At last, he nodded. Harry mentally heaved a sigh of relief.

"Such a talented mind," Greyback said, smirking slightly as he turned to Remus. "The Dark Heir does indeed live up to his name. Worthy of the Dark Lord, he is."

Remus did not crack a smile.

"The credit goes to father," Harry emphasized that the Dark Lord was much more powerful than he was. "Perhaps we should discuss the details of the alliance now?" he pressed on, indicating silently that the previous conversation was over.

"We should," Greyback replied.

"Our alliance is simple. All we require of your pack is to stand by the Dark Lord during the war when he attempts to gain control of Wizarding Britain and beyond," Harry said simply.

"And in return?" Greyback asked eagerly.

"Your pack would be under our protection and should the need arise, the Dark Lord would fight for you with the Ministry and Dumbledore's Order."

"Your protection..." Greyback said softly, dangerously. "We do not need your protection," he snarled.

Harry merely smiled as he casually replied. "Yes, if you think so? You might remember the witch Amelia Bones?" The two wolves nodded curtly. "Before her rather ... unfortunate passing, she imposed new laws to prosecute werewolves for research to be done on them. The captured werewolves will undergo a series of tests in the Department of Mysteries and I assure you, this tests usually leaves one half-dead or worse, insane."

"We are perfectly capable and aware of the new law," Remus said slowly. "And we are perfectly aware of the disposal of Amelia Bones."

"Then you should realize that the Unspeakables are not above using illegal and dark curses and that your wolves will not be able to overpower them in a fight," Harry stated blatantly. "The Dark Lord on the other hand, is more than capable of assigning Death Eaters to fight by your side during such times. And our Death Eaters are highly trained and capable of dueling."

"Very, very, clever, my Dark Heir," Greyback drawled. Remus turned to look at Greyback.

"The added benefits include the fact that the wizarding population will fear your pack much more if you were to align yourselves with the most powerful Dark Lord to step into the Wizarding World," Harry continued. "That is what the Dark Lord is willing to offer your pack in exchange for your support for our cause."

"If we were to not accept?"

"Then we would leave you alone," Harry said without hesitation. "Your pack might belong to the Dark side, considering that werewolves are Dark Creatures, but the wizarding world would know

that you are not under the Dark Lord's protection and should you be attacked, he would not assist you."

"You – !" Greyback snarled. "The Dark Lord's protection? We are perfectly capable of handling ourselves and to defend our territory from the meddling fools of the Ministry!"

Harry arched a brow elegantly.

"I see that the discussion has come to an end," he gave a laugh. He had to play this correctly or the alliance would be lost. "But do bear in mind that werewolves are not the only creatures whose alliance we seek. Giants, Vampires and Goblins alike, we will also be seeking their alliance. To not align yourselves with us would be going against the rest of the Dark Creatures."

Bellatrix gave a large, triumphant smile. Was it a look of betrayal on Remus's face he saw? But he carefully stood up and headed for the door.

"It was a nice time talking to you," he said in a casual tone, reaching for the door with Bellatrix behind him.

"Wait."

He paused, his hand on the handle of the door. He could have blast it open wandlessly of course, but where was the dramaticness and the fun of that? A smug smile graced his face as he turned slowly, majestically. For the first time since he entered the room, he allowed his aura to be made known.

The Dark, alluring aura smothered the room. The previously repressed aura now lashed across the dark room, making the room seem even darker than before. It was to the point of slight suffocation where Harry started to repress the rest of the aura. No need to scare Greyback by showing him the full extent of his auras, Harry thought smugly.

"You wanted to add something?" He asked innocently.

Greyback did not reply. He was staring open mouthed at Harry for a second before he rose from his seat once more, slowly clapping. The loud claps rebounded across the room, creating an echo.

"Such a talented young one. To think I was wondering of your magical capabilities," Greyback drawled with a victorious smirk.

"Jokes aside, Greyback, what is it you wanted to add?" He feigned nonchalance but inside, his heart was thumping. This was it. The alliance, the alliance...

"We accept." Greyback held out his hand.

Bellatrix let out a cackle of laughter and with a measured gaze, Harry coolly shook the extended hand. As his hand touched Greyback's a red-hot glow emerged between them, entwining their hands together. It was the unmistakable Unbreakable Vow – the vow of the alliance between the Dark Lord and the werewolves under Greyback's command.

"This is it then, my little Heir? Remus would see you out," Greyback said once the handshake was broken.

"There would be no need."

"We insist," Greyback insisted as Remus rose from his chair and strode forwards to Harry and Bellatrix. As he neared the door, it swung open with a loud click.

"Please," Remus gestured.

Harry stepped out of the room followed by Bellatrix as he reluctantly followed Remus. He had a bad feeling about this... why didn't he want to follow Remus? But even so, he trudged along behind Remus who made no sign of wanting to attempt a cordial conversation.

Harry shrugged. That was fine with him. He didn't know if he could maintain a conversation with Remus without slipping up and saying something he would sorely regret.

"In here," Remus pointed to the lift Harry saw earlier. Nelisa waved at him from her receptionist desk and he allowed a cool smile in return. He warily stepped into the lift followed by Bellatrix who wore an expression of utmost disgust on her face.

The lift doors clanked shut as Remus jabbed a button. Then Harry realized something, evidently they weren't going up but down, further underground.

"Where are you bringing us to?" He asked suspiciously.

"All in a good time," Remus replied casually as the lift doors opened once more with a loud noise.

Remus strode out of the lift and Harry noted that they were as he predicted, even further underground. This corridor was like the previous – dark and damp, but if it were possible, even colder than the first. Unlike the previous level, the current level was more spacious and it was quiet, with no sign of anyone.

There were only two room in this level and Remus confidently led Harry and Bellatrix into the first before shutting the door discreetly behind him. Bellatrix looked bewildered but Harry held his hand up to silence her. He was curious as to what Remus had to say.

A smaller table stood in the middle of the room and Harry slowly took a seat at one of the chairs. Bellatrix made a movement to sit beside Harry but Remus intervened.

"I would prefer it Bellatrix, if you were to wait outside." He said coolly, gesturing towards the door which swung open.

Bellatrix sneered. "No."

"Bella, go, for a minute," Harry said carefully. "Wait outside while I tend to my... business."

"Harry!" Bellatrix began and Harry saw Remus's eyes light up in disbelief and was it happiness?

"Go." He gave a curt nod of reassurance. Once Bellatrix left the room unwillingly, Harry turned back to Remus and got straight to the point.

"Was there something you wanted, Lupin?"

"I know who you are," Remus replied simply.

Harry froze.

"Take off your mask."

A moment of hesitation then – "No."

"Please." Remus was on the verge of pleading now. He needed to see if this Dark Heir was Lily and James's son... his godson, his missing godson Harry James Potter... he needed to see if the Dark Heir was the person he was searching for all these years...

"I am not who you think I am." Harry gritted out.

"Then prove it. Take off your mask," Remus challenged.

"No."

Remus sighed. "Please... Harry. I know it's you. You are Harry James Potter. I smelled you from the moment you entered the Room. I know it's you despite how different you are and seem. It's you beneath the mask... Please, take off your mask, I know it is you."

Harry cursed in his head. Of course! How could he have forgotten that Remus could smell him? He had spent enough time for Remus to know his scent even after ten long years. He mentally berated himself for forgetting about it. That was probably what gave him away. Although, he couldn't possibly borrow... perfume or cologne from Draco could he?

"Harry?"

Very, very slowly, Harry's hand reached for his white-gold mask as though his actions were controlled by Remus. His fingers fingered the tip of it, his eyes unsure. His heart was racing, what was he to do now? He couldn't and yet something told him that this was the moment, he had to –

With a flourish, he removed his mask which fell to the floor with a soft clatter.

A seconds' pause.

Amber eyes locked with emerald green ones. Neither blinked, both staring into the other...

A shocked gasp followed by a hiss of disbelief –

"Harry?"

Harry gave a jerky, curt nod as he acknowledged his identity.

"But ... how could you... Harry? You, ten years ago, you were missing and yet ..." Remus stuttered.

"I ran away from home."

Seconds ticked by before Remus heaved a sad sigh. "I knew of course... after you left." Harry looked puzzled and Remus explained, "I persuaded Lily and James to look for you but they thought it was better off for you, to not be under your brother's shadow any longer." Remus's face now twisted to one of rage before he adjusted his expression.

"Which is why I ran, Remus." Harry said softly. "I couldn't stay there any longer – in that place, under the thumb of Joshua," he sneered, "that is not my home! It is not and never was since the prophecy was made!" his voice inched towards desperation.

He needed Remus to understand, understand why he did what he did... that he never really regretted his choice to join Voldemort, that he couldn't possibly betray Voldemort and return to the Light Side, to Albus Dumbledore, to his parents Lily and James Potter, to his brother the chosen one, he could not, he needed Remus to know, to understand why he couldn't and wouldn't!

"I know cub, so much happened since you left. So many things changed." For a moment, Remus looked as though he aged ten years as he thought of the past and stared into space.

And then Harry realized.

"You left too, didn't you? Ten years ago?" He could not help the accusing tone in his voice. Why did Remus leave James and Lily? They were his best of friends. Without James and Lily's influence, status and protection, he was just seen as an outcast in the

Wizarding World. As much as Harry would hate to admit it, it was probably the Order, Dumbledore and the Lord Potter's position that ensured Remus did not get mocked at in the society.

A tortured look passed Remus. "Yes I did," he said warily. "I could not bear to stay with James and Lily any longer. They changed, Harry, they changed so much, all they cared was for Joshua's fame, Dumbledore's orders and their status! Lily – she – I couldn't believe that she could have said the things she did! The sweet, kind, popular Lily Evans, she just changed into another person!"

Harry nodded sadly as he thought about his mother in his six years with her. Ever since the prophecy was made, Lily was no longer sweet or kind; she was harsh, critical and judgmental.

"But you! Harry – you smell different!" Remus continued. "It's like your scent is mixed with something else..." he wrinkled his nose slightly. "I can't say it is bad or it doesn't suit you – in fact it better suits you than before, somehow – but it feels different, wrong, and it doesn't feel like it came from either Lily and James and it's not a scent I recognize either. It is a familiar, but I don't know where I might have smelled it... It feels very dark... like your blood is mixed with what muggles call Blood Transfusion... but it can't be..."

Harry's eyes widened as he realized.

"Of course!" he said excitedly before he quickly covered his excitement with a somber look. "I – I took a Blood Ritual," he said slightly apologetically at the sight of Remus's frown. "With Voldemort," he added and saw Remus blanch and his face turn a nasty chalky white.

"Harry - ! You do realize that Voldemort is – is!" Remus exclaimed after he got past his shock.

Harry remained impassive and dismissed Remus's statement. "It's not that bad, he treats me decently, like his son or his Heir I guess... He isn't as bad as the Prophet makes him out to be," Remus gave a look of incredulity and he added, "Alright... I guess he is dark and all but you just have to accept it that he loves to torture and kill... But really, he isn't as insane as Dumbledore makes him to be like. At least he does not manipulate like the old coot does." He huffed.

A look of horror flashed across Remus as he seemed to recall something.

"Then the Ministry – Amelia Bones? Was it..." Remus's voice dropped to a whisper. He leaned in to Harry. "Was it... you?"

"Amelia Bones?" Harry said coolly while arching a brow. "Yeah, I guess so," he said offhandedly. At the sight of Remus's aghast expression, he hastily corrected himself, "She was really going against our allies so it was kind of necessary..." Seeing the disbelief on Remus's face, he said quickly, "And I didn't enjoy it, not killing..."

"Harry! Then... was that your only murder then?" Remus asked quickly.

Harry nodded, thankful that was the truth.

Remus looked thoughtful again as Harry steeled himself for another sticky question. After all, much were needed to know after ten years of separation.

"And what about your Uncle Wormtail? Did Voldemort capture him?" Remus asked after a second. "We never realized what happened to him after his latest mission years ago. He vanished about the same time as you did."

A look of confusion passed Harry as he frowned, then he remembered. "Oh," he said. "Uncle Wormtail..." his voice trailed off. "He was a spy and Voldemort –"

"A SPY!" bellowed Remus who jumped up. "Wormtail a SPY?"

Harry waited for Remus to calm down before he continued his sentence. "He was a spy, he was the traitor amongst the Order and Voldemort killed him the night he took me in as an Heir because he couldn't have any witnesses and Wormtail happened to be there when I arrived."

"Harry!" Remus said in a choked gasp. "Wormtail ... he! But he couldn't possibly be the spy!" Seeing Harry's firm look, all the fight seem to deflate out of him and his shoulders hunched. "He's dead then? Wormtail...? My old, friend... all these while he was dead?" he hushed.

Harry nodded, this time a feeling of guilt settled within him. Wormtail didn't really need to die, except he just happened to be there...

"Oh Harry... so much has changed and I don't know what to think now." For the first time since Harry entered the room, Remus looked dejected. "What would Lily and James say if they knew that you were the Dark Heir?"

'Finally', Harry thought. They came to the part where he would have to face his parents and his brother. He couldn't just cut off their blood ties, even if he could be blood-adopted by Voldemort. Lily and James's blood still ran through him, as much as the idea repulsed him. How could he be related to them? And yet, he was sure that the feeling was mutual.

"You would have to fight against Joshua, you do know, don't you?"

"Yes... But my loyalty won't change. But Remus, you could join us, join the Dark Lord. He would give you the protection you need, you don't have to be under Dumbledore any longer! And you don't have to deny, because I know you are unhappy with Dumbledore and his many manipulations too!"

A torn look was etched on Remus's face. He buried his face into his hands before looking into Harry's eye.

"Harry, I can't." The way Remus said it made him realize the amount of pain in those words. "As much as I now disagree with several of the Order and Dumbledore's views, I cannot go against them. I can never face Lily and James in a battle. Even if I don't like it, Dumbledore has done me much. He allowed me to go to Hogwarts when no other Headmaster would have done so!"

"He wanted your loyalty! He wanted you to be the spy in the werewolves all along and by allowing you to go to Hogwarts, he gained your loyalty and in turn, you are eternally grateful to him!"

"Yet I cannot deny what he has done for me, Harry. I don't think – let's not have this conversation anymore."

"Then stay neutral, neutral in this war," Harry pressed on. "You don't have to join the Dark side, you can be neutral," he offered. "Father

has promised me that he would not go after you should you go neutral... Please Remus... If you remain neutral, then you won't have to face Lily or James or myself in the war."

A shred of hope lit up in Remus's eye.

"Neutral." He repeated, his gaze never wavering from Harry's.

"Neutral," Harry echoed. "You could be neutral. I know that you are reluctant to join Father because you worked so hard, you strived to show the world that just because you are a Dark Creature does not make you a Dark Wizard and by joining us, you would be going past that! But if you remain with Dumbledore, you are just letting yourself be used by him! Stay neutral in the war, Remus. I could never fight against you. You were the only friend I had in Godrics Hollow."

Remus did not reply for minutes. Harry sat in the chair, watching him patiently as the seconds ticked by. It seemed like eternity, all these while he was hoping in his heart, hoping that Remus would not disappoint him... Hoping, hoping...

At last Remus looked up.

"I – I will be neutral in this war," he croaked.

It felt like the world had exploded. A wild fire lit up in Harry's heart and it was as though all of his burden was eased. The only thing that tied him down to the Light side was Remus. Now that Remus was no longer part of it, he did not have an inch of guilt against the Light. He could finally be the cold, ruthless Dark Heir towards the Light that his father always hoped for. He didn't have to worry about any casualties... this worked out better than he had hoped!

Harry did not really remember what happen next. All he knew was that the future seemed brighter all of a sudden. He did not have any ties left to break or patch, he could be what he wanted; everyone he cared for was on the same side as he was or neutral.

Remus, his friends, his Aunt Bella, his father, everyone that he treasured, was with him! It seemed too good to be true, yet Harry knew that Remus would never betray him this way. A simple Legimency check confirmed it.

He felt almost giddy with relief and remained in high spirits even after he arrived back to the Riddle Manor.

The first step of his life was accomplished.

"Thank you," he remembered himself thanking Remus. It was sincere, genuine, unlike the many times he thanked people out of politeness.

And now, all that was left was for himself to eliminate his father's only enemy. The same enemy who made his life hell in the Potters. Nope, said person did not regard their blood ties but treated him even less than that of his friends. In that person's eyes, he was nothing, akin to a squib, a stranger and beneath him. All that mattered to that person was his fame, and himself, and he would gladly sacrifice him, Harry, for it.

His brother, Joshua Damien Potter.

Author's Notes

This is my longest chapter yet! On Microsoft word, it is 15 pages long and about 10000 words. I hope it isn't boring anybody out because by the time I was finished with it, I was exhausted. I honestly didn't think I could write that long.

One question: Do you want the length of each chapter to be longer or shorter? The time taken for me to update would not be affected because I usually set 'deadlines' for myself to update by, so it really just means that I put more time into it to make the chapter longer, or less time into it for the chapter to be shorter.

Please leave a review if you have the time, thanks!

8. The Mission Impossible

"It is not possible."

Each syllable was forcefully pronounced.

"It has to be!" came a protest from the boy sitting opposite him.

Harry looked at Draco in disbelief and incredulity as he tried to register what his friend had just told him. It was impossible – surely his father wouldn't send Draco to a suicide mission? After all, there were many other people who could better fit the job such as the Hogwarts spy, Severus Snape.

"You mean to say, Father wants you, of all people – and more capable ones too –" he added after an afterthought and dismissed Draco's affronted glare, "to get Death Eaters into Hogwarts itself?" Harry repeated. Draco nodded quickly, a look of panic on his aristocratic face.

"You're joking. It's impossible," Harry said dismissively, but inside, his brain was thinking of all possible ways for it to happen. Secret passages... the Whomping Willow and all, but they were all highly guarded, no doubt.

Hogwarts was a very ancient castle and it had every possible ward guarding it.

The four founders were sure to have put in every possible charm on it. Muggle Repelling, Anti-apparition and Floo Networks being watched by the Ministry of Magic made it impossible for a boy like Draco to tear down the wards. It needed a team of curse breakers and several months to accomplish it, unless there was another entrance to the prestige school. However, the security of Hogwarts had tightened over the summer and now additional wards were placed over the secret passages – which his Dumbledore somehow got wind of.

"But the Dark Lord – he says –I've got to do it if I want to live! He will kill me if I don't!" Draco's voice was strangled and he buried his head in his hands, his usually cool and composed composure lost. "By the end of the year!"

"It's impossible. I can't help you with it. I'm at Durmstrang. You're at Hogwarts, we're hundreds of miles away." Harry stated bluntly, seeming to be unaffected by his friend's words as he leaned backwards onto the bed. "Even if we do get past the communication barrier, how am I supposed to help you from Durmstrang?"

"I don't know," Draco moaned. "But it has to be done by this year and the Dark Lord doesn't tolerate mistakes. But – but ... the actual thing is for me to," Draco dropped his voice into a mere whisper and hurriedly glanced around, checking the silencing charms he had cast around Harry's bedroom, "kill Dumbledore and this is the only way I've got to get him cornered! The Death Eaters – I can't do it myself!"

Harry stared at Draco in shock. Kill Dumbledore? Had the world spun in the opposite direction today? It's impossible – for Draco to do it. Even his father himself hadn't managed to do it – let alone the Malfoy Heir, a sixteen year old boy who hasn't even come of age. It was downright insane not to mention there was no way of the mission being completed.

He sighed heavily and considered his options which basically left one, for him to persuade his Father to spare Draco from this torturous mission.

"I'll talk to Father about it. That's the only thing I can do to help you," he promised. He would make his father see reason. There was no way his father would let Draco do it, he could try to talk his father out of it. No point sending the Malfoy Heir on a suicide mission. Draco was one of the two best friends he had.

Draco instinctively clamped a hand over Harry's mouth as he exclaimed, "Are you crazy? This mission is top secret and you weren't even supposed to know of it yet!"

Harry's eyes narrowed and for a moment, a look of coldness settled on his face. He looked pointedly at Draco who hastily removed his hand, looking slightly abashed. The room's temperature seemed to have dropped a few degrees.

The change was gone the next second as Harry relaxed slightly at his friend's terrified stare. No point scaring his friend, but inwardly he smirked at the terror he could give his friend. Draco should realise

that Harry would never intentionally harm any of his friends. Yet nevertheless, what Draco said infuriated him slightly. Why couldn't his father let him know?

"What do you mean, I'm not supposed to know?" he demanded with a hardening edge to his voice. "Explain," the cool tone was apparent.

Draco looked nervous now as he fidgeted. "Well..." he began and Harry prompted him with a hard glare. "The Dark Lord specifically said that I wasn't supposed to tell you now."

"Now." He repeated coolly.

"He – the Dark Lord said I could only tell you later in the school year. But I don't quite get what he means... I mean," Draco said quickly, "There's no difference if I told you now right? You would still know... well eventually, I guess."

Harry stared thoughtfully of to space. Why would Voldemort want him to know of the mission only when he was in the school year? He was puzzled, he couldn't think of a proper reason. Unless, in the school year, there was no way Harry could help Draco with him being in Durmstrang, but was that what his Father wanted? If he didn't know his father better, he would say that his father wanted him to help Draco with his mission.

'No,' Harry thought to himself. His father would not let Draco handle this alone. It was impossible to the point of incredulity. But he knew better than to question his Father's reason – there was definitely something which he was missing.

His father always knew what he was doing. Or perhaps he should just go with the flow, and see what happens? He was almost sure that his father had something set in store for him.

But back to the problem at hand...Harry's mind raced forward for all the possible ways that Death Eaters could use to get into Hogwarts. There were plenty, he was sure, but not all of them were feasible for a team of ten.

At last, he turned to face Draco and he saw Draco clearly relaxing after he softened his tone.

"The best chance we've got is a secret passage – one that Dumbledore has no knowledge of. That would be the best way we can have to get the Death Eaters in. Tearing down the wards is no use; Dumbledore would know of it and fix it in a second and besides, it takes too long a time," he deduced.

"Secret passages?" Draco echoed and started pacing around the room. "There's seven in Hogwarts," he slowly listed each and every one out and Harry listened intently. The next second, however, Draco's face twisted into a slight grimace. "But they're all protected and guarded. Apparently some Gryffindors alerted Dumbledore of the passages. Must be the blood traitor, Mudblood and the Chosen One," he sneered.

Harry showed no outward sign at the phrase the "Chosen One" but inside, he was thinking as fast as he could. So his brother knew about the Secret Passages? That posed as a problem, and a major one at that. From what he heard from Draco's long rants over the years at Hogwarts, he knew that his brother was one who never set much store for rules – very much like him if he had to admit it. If Draco lingered too much at the passages, his brother would definitely investigate it.

It was no surprise for they were arch enemies at school after all.

"Harry? Harry?" Draco said when he did not reply, waving his hands in front of his face.

"I was just thinking. No, there must be some other passages that Dumbledore does not know," Harry murmured, deep in thoughts. Why hadn't he gone to Hogwarts then? He would then have a better knowledge of the castle...

Draco frowned and started to retort when there was a loud bang at the door and several more followed. In shock, Draco leapt up from the bed and toppled out of sight. Harry then realised that someone was hammering the door insistently and he could see a flash of light from outside the door, a sign of which an unlocking charm was being used. Slightly amused, he rose from his bed and glided over towards the door as a voice floated towards him.

"Harrison Riddle, if you don't unlock the door this instant I will personally curse you into the next century!"

An amused smirk twisted Harry's lips as he wandlessly dismantled the locks, having recognized the voice of his best friend from Durmstrang. Draco too, recognized the voice and rose from the floor, wincing in pain as he walked over to where Harry stood just as a figure entered the room gracefully.

The tall figure of Celestine Evangeline Travers could be seen as she all but glided into the room, removing the hood from her cloak as she did so and revealing her aristocratic face and pale skin. Her hair was long and it hung to the back of her waist. It was a colour of dark silky brown, though it shined red under the light of the room. The pale skin and dark hair were two very contrasting features – it was as though to highlight Celeste's personality. She could be kind and helpful one second and powerfully dangerous the next when angered. Her sharp deep-blue eyes scanned the room and fell on the two teenagers in front of her. Her full lips formed a smile, her previous agitation gone.

"I thought I heard your voices," Celeste said lightly as she discarded her cloak and chose a seat at Harry's bed, next to where Draco had sat previously.

"Celeste," Harry greeted, enveloping her into a hug and Draco scowled. Celeste turned to her long time friend and a soft laugh escaped her at the sight of Draco.

Harry looked at Draco and Celeste in bemusement. He had known Draco from his time at the Malfoy Manor but when he had gone on to Durmstrang, he made another friend there – Celeste, whose father was a member of the Inner Circle. Celeste was a great friend to be with, her intelligence matched his own and she was certainly charming in her own way and easy to talk to.

Unlike most girls who only had their mind in the clouds or on the latest edition of Witch Weekly, Celeste also spent her time in the Durmstrang Library, researching on more curses, hexes and jinxes. The two grew to be experienced Duellers from their vast theory knowledge and practical trainings. They often duelled each other in the Riddle Manor during summer where Draco would join in - reluctantly.

When Harry invited Celeste to the Riddle Manor over the summer holidays, he invited Draco as well. The Malfoy Heir hadn't taken to Celeste's presence very well – in fact, Draco was downright irritated that Harry managed to find himself a friend who was just as close to himself as Draco was.

Draco very much prided himself to be the best friend of the Dark Heir.

The first time Draco greeted Celeste, it was a scowl. Over the years however, Draco and Celeste finally grew closer due to the excessive amount of time they spent together.

Sebastian Travers was a good friend of Lucius Malfoy and the two teenagers would often find themselves stuck together – Draco glaring and Celeste ignoring pointedly – when Lucius and Sebastian conversed for long periods at some Christmas Ball or another.

Eventually, Draco and Celeste also became best of friends. Harry could still remember vividly how it happened – Draco had somehow managed to set fire on the girl's bathroom during the Summer Ball during a temper tantrum and unfortunately, he hadn't known that Celeste was in that very bathroom at that time. Both he and Draco had rushed into the bathroom to put out the fire and they were just in time to rescue Celeste from the blazing flames which threatened to swallow her whole.

Although the animosity between Celeste and Draco was forgotten, apparently Draco was still used to greeting her with his traditional scowl, not that Celeste minded. On the other hand, she found it funny the way Draco sometimes acted like the youngest Weasley son. Celeste was just gracious in that way, like a true pureblood witch and Harry silently thanked her for that. He hated to be stuck in a fight between two of his best friends like he was before their new found friendship.

"What?" Draco protested when Harry finally turned to him, glaring slightly. Draco lifted his hands in protest as he jabbered, "Well – I thought I had the silencing charms up the door. Well it was locked in any case."

"I meant Celeste," Harry refrained from rolling his eyes.

His reply was a look of confusion from Draco when Celeste interrupted.

"Scowling is not good for you, Draco," Celeste bit her lip to control her laughter as she remembered Draco's expression.

Smiling in an anticipated sort of way, she stood up and said in a pompous voice in imitation of the Draco, "the Malfoys are most elegant, most graceful and we would never ever scowl at anyone and that will include the Weasleys."

It was amazing as to how Celeste could imitate Draco but retain her pureblood dignity at the same time. He always suspected that she was part Veela. She had the typical Veela temper as well.

Harry snickered at Celeste who smirked at flustered Draco. Draco flushed a deep red as he hurriedly tugged at Celeste's arms, dragging her back to her seat while she flounced around the room, in an imitation of Draco and Harry had to admit, she did capture the way Draco emphasized his words and gestured arrogantly.

"Alright, alright!" Draco threw his hands up in mock defeat and turned to glare at Celeste childishly.

All he received in return was a smug smile from Celeste who slowly sunk back to her seat, and now turned to him in interest after the laughter died down.

"What is it about Secret Passages that I heard the both of you talking about?" she asked curiously. "Not another one at Riddle Manor? I thought you both pretty much found every one of them." Her lips twitched into a smile. Back in their first and second year, they spent day after day combing the manor for passages that Harry had not yet discovered in his childhood.

Harry frowned slightly and he began to explain Draco's predicament while Draco nodded vigorously every so frequently.

"And so, that's why we were discussing about the secret passages," he concluded. "There are seven of them and Dumbledore knows all of them because of some students –"

"Gryffindors," Draco corrected. "The mudblood, chosen one and the blood traitor to be specific."

Harry waved him off and continued, "told him and we're thinking if there's any other passages in. Do you happen to know of any?" he asked but he highly doubted it since Celeste was also in Durmstrang.

Celeste looked thoughtful as she unconsciously ran a finger through her long dark hair.

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "I suppose there might be something, but I can't be too sure, but I suppose, perhaps..." she bit her lip in hesitation, an internal battle inside her.

"What is it?" Draco demanded, jumping up in undisguised eagerness. Harry quickly pulled him back down to his seat on his bed.

Celeste hesitated for a fraction of a second, before saying carefully, "I remembered Parkinson bragging something about Montague vanishing in a cabinet at Hogwarts and... reappearing weeks later. I heard that he could hear what was going on in...Borgin and Burkes, but I can't be sure," she admitted. "Parkinson isn't exactly reliable." A look of disgust now appeared on her face.

But Draco's eyes lit up and he exclaimed, "But of course! The Vanishing Cabinet! I can't believe I never thought of it! So it means the room is true as well!"

"What room?" Celeste asked quickly.

"I don't know, it's some room that Montague found on the seventh floor. I know he is talking about from his over long descriptions, but there's never been a room there – unless it's a secret room or something. Hogwarts has loads of those." Draco looked thoughtful now as he considered, no doubt remembering where the room should have been.

"So it exists then, the cabinet?" Celeste inquired again.

Draco nodded his head vigorously, a silly grin on his face, his eyes lit with hope.

Harry hissed in irritation at the pair of them. It couldn't be what he was thinking of, could it? He had to check. "Could either one of you be so kind to let me know what exactly is a Vanishing Cabinet?"

"A pair of Vanishing Cabinet will act as a passage between two places," Celeste explained patiently. "Humans and objects placed in one cabinet will appear in the other and from what I heard, the cabinets seem to ward off all known defensive spells and enchantments."

Harry raised his eyebrows, glancing at Celeste and Draco in slight disbelief. The last he heard of it, these things were not seen for several decades. To think there was one in Hogwarts...

"Are you sure? Absolutely?" he said sharply.

Draco scowled again as he repeated, "Yes. I heard about it last year – it was all over Hogwarts. Slytherin Quidditch Captain missing for weeks and turns up in a... was it a girls bathroom?"

"Excellent," Harry said in satisfaction as he sat back on the bed, crossing his legs. "Is it in working condition then?"

Draco's smile faltered and a deeply unsettled look flashed across his face.

"Harry..." Celeste began quietly. "When Montague got lost in it, it was because the cabinet is broken so he couldn't find his way out of it. He spent weeks inside it, trying to find his way out and he eventually apparated."

Draco groaned. "And I thought that was a rumour," he agreed with Celeste. "I thought Montague was blowing things out of proportion as usual."

"Turns out he wasn't," Harry mused, his voice trailing off. "I'm confident we can fix it though."

"We?" Celeste interrupted sharply.

"That's another problem," Harry said as he stood up and started pacing around the room. "Draco is at Hogwarts and while we are at

Durmstrang, we cannot help him. Unless there is somehow, we manage to transfer to Hogwarts? If father agrees, that is."

"It's impossible," Celeste dismissed the idea instantly. "Dumbledore would be suspicious immediately with two Durmstrang students, friends of Malfoy, transferring to Hogwarts. And school will start in four days time – there isn't enough time for preparation of the transfer."

"We will deal with that later," Harry said calmly. "What we need to do now is to plan. Even if we do get the Death Eaters into the castle, what is the next step to take?"

Neither Celeste nor Draco replied. Harry resumed his pacing around the room, slowly pondering. How would they corner Dumbledore? Dumbledore would be well protected by the Aurors and members of the Order patrolling the school.

"I can't think of anything except a head-on fight, but even then, we might lose the battle," Celeste admitted after minutes, standing up and joining Harry in his pacing. "The Aurors prove as a complication and the security has strengthened over this summer. I'm almost sure that the Order of the Phoenix would be there."

"That's helpful!" Draco snarled, clearly agitated by the lack of development.

Celeste ignored him. "If we do get a team of about ten Death Eaters into Hogwarts, they have to be powerful – those in the Inner Circle. But I don't think the Dark Lord would allow them to participate in the battle, would he, Harry?"

"No," Harry said curtly. "Some of the Inner Circle are now being suspected for their involvement with the latest raid in Tottenham Court Road and Father requests of them to lie low for the moment. It would not do us group should the powerful and influential members of the Inner Circle are recognized in the battle. Even with their masks they might still be recognizable."

"Unless you are in the battle, Harry, we both know that you are almost as powerful as the Dark Lord himself," Celeste interrupted, a frown on her face.

Draco brightened up at this.

"That's an idea," he exclaimed excitedly. "Harry, if you were in the battle itself, then I'm sure that we'll have the battle in the bag! If there's anyone with a prayer of taking down the old fool, then it will be you!"

Harry cleared his throat and pierced Draco with a stare.

"And how, do you expect me to go from Durmstrang all the way to Hogwarts? Even the Dark Lord cannot apparate through those wards," he snapped and instantly regretted his tone at once.

"But – but Harry, you can't possibly ask myself alone to duel all those people!" Draco protested immediately and hurt was evident in his voice. The Malfoy Heir was already reliant on Harry to save him in times of trouble.

Harry maintained his calm mask as he replied as venomously as he could, "I will think of ways to help you. For now let this discussion come to an end."

"Harry?" Celeste stopped her pacing and turned towards him. In the space of a second where their eyes met, he saw the understanding form in her eyes and she retreated, respecting his need for privacy and space to work out for a solution. The years of Durmstrang had indeed allowed Celeste to understand him.

He was a person who valued his freedom and space very much. He could never think clearly when he was surrounded by people, even his friends. It was the same way as his father. He needed his peace and quiet.

Draco, however, wasn't that patient. His neck was on the line after all, and Harry didn't doubt that his Father wouldn't break his word. It was up to him to help Draco, yet the stubborn Malfoy Heir refused to let him persuade and convince his Father to cancel the mission.

"You can't desert me! Without you, this plan will go down the drain!" Draco began angrily. "You cannot!"

"And how," Harry said coldly in reply, "Do you expect me to think of a solution while you badger me with your childish behaviour over here?"

Draco immediately flinched at his cold tone, but Harry did not betray anything in his words. He needed time to think, think alone and carefully, before he could help his friend. This was not a time to pacify Draco with his spoiled ways – he needed his space right now.

He raised his hand and the door unlocked with a soft click and its volume seemed to magnify ten times in this silent room. He was aware of Draco looking at him with betrayal, but he knew everything would be alright once he got it sorted out. Celeste gave him a look of trust as she slowly tugged Draco out of the room.

Draco gave him one last glare between a pleading glance before he stormed out of the room reluctantly, Celeste at his heels.

Once the duo was out, Harry was free to let his emotions run freely across his face – displayed for all to see. He slowly sunk onto his bed and buried his head in his hands in pure frustration. Just days ago he had been over the moon and he thought his life was perfect with Remus's safety assured. Now it seemed as though he would have to worry about Draco's safety as well.

It seemed as though he was going to spend the rest of his life worrying over the safety of others. When he was young, he worried for his father and Aunt Bella whenever they went for another riot, though now he knew his worry was usually unfounded. Now, he had to worry for his young friends who were trapped in the era of the Second Battle.

He glanced at the mirror in front of him reflexively, thinking that grey hairs would surely appear should he continue with his worrying. It was a figure of speech for he wasn't vain like Draco. Appearance was just but another tool for his persuasiveness. Of course, he couldn't kid himself, his hair was as black as it was years ago – the precise colour of the hair Tom Riddle once – and now – had. Well, that distracted him for a bit. He thought about how his Father had gotten back his old looks save for the crimson eyes ever since he absorbed the rest of his horcruxes except for the one residing in Slytherin's locket.

Yet if he were to go into the battle with Draco, he was sure Celeste would be following, no questions asked. He might have to stun her but even as he thought of the idea, he abandoned it. She would berate him for the rest of his life and hold this grudge.

So there was no way Celeste would voluntarily abandon them then. The three of them were inseparable in times of danger and Celeste spoke of loyalty. And while he trusted Celeste's superior duelling skills, he could not guarantee everyone's safety. Either she or Draco might slip up, they couldn't be careful all the time. If they were injured in the battle because of him... he didn't want to think about it. He would never allow that to happen, he couldn't allow harm to befall on his friends. The only people he genuinely cared about other than his Father and Aunt Bella.

The vibrant green eyes stared back at him in the mirror, unblinking. He stared into the depths of those eyes for a long time and he saw the resolved formed slowly, but surely.

He, Draco and Celeste were not friends for nothing, nor were they those fickle friends in name. They were true and real friends – and a rather rare find in the pureblood circle – who would stand by each other in times of need. This time, Draco needed help – serious help. If he couldn't convince his father to think otherwise, then he would try his best to help Draco to complete his mission. It was as though it was his responsibility.

Harry felt as though he was betraying his father, ever so slightly. It wasn't the first time he had done something behind Voldemort's back – though they usually resulted in rather dire consequences, particularly the Diagon Alley episode – and while his previous actions did not warrant him a Cruciatus Curse, he was sure that if he were to enter the battle himself without his father's consent, Voldemort might be enraged enough to grant him the Crucio for risking his life.

He would have to find some time to tell his father about his plans to help Draco. Surely Voldemort didn't expect him to leave Draco to the evil clutches of Death?

And Dumbledore – the old fool. He half-wished that he could kill Dumbledore in Draco's stead, but it was not his mission to

accomplish. If only he had the chance, the opportunity to lay his hands on the meddling fool, then Draco would be spared of this fate. And so would Celeste, and the rest of the Death Eaters, not risking their lives for his plan...

It was Dumbledore's fault. Dumbledore's fault that Draco had his neck on the line – Dumbledore's fault that he would have to lead Celeste into the battle and the rest of the Death Eaters. What if someone got injured?

Harry instantly recalled seeing Dumbledore's face smiling merrily up from the Daily Prophet, his eyes twinkling madly as he continued with his lies and manipulations. 'The Dark Heir, a twisted monster, an abomination to the Wizarding World that needed to be ridded off immediately?' Dumbledore proclaimed, his words echoing from the Prophet after he murdered Amelia Bones.

Or how he constantly said, 'A mistake which should be corrected when given the chance'?

So was that what he was, to Dumbledore? A mistake? A mistake? Was he a mistake for existing and stealing his brother glory? If he hadn't existed, the Le Fey Curse would remain dormant in the blood lines, his Father would not have the gift as well and the Chosen One wouldn't have to face such an abomination, such a monster, such a powerful mistake, along with Voldemort himself!

A mistake was he!

"LIES!"

A crazed scream left him in his maddening rage and the mirror shattered into a thousand pieces. Each fragment of the mirror glinted in the sunlight, reflecting rainbows around him. He stared into the colourful rainbows for a long time before a broken laughter escaped him as he laughed hollowly.

He laughed, laughed about the lies Dumbledore fed the Wizarding world. He did not deny that his killing of Amelia Bones was not justified to the Light side, but was his existence a mistake?

Minutes ticked by, slowly, second by second and the insane, broken laughter stopped.

He was breathing heavily, his cool composure lost. It was the first time he had been so enraged, so worked up over his past for years. Neither Celeste nor Draco had known about his past, and they had enough sense to maintain it this way since he was always been unusually vague on the topic. Yet he would have to control his temper in future. Voldemort had always stressed that point to him – to control his emotions and never let anyone know how he was feeling on the inside.

When he was happy, he had to remain calm. When he was upset, he had to act like everything was okay. When he was enraged, he would have to keep his cool.

Draco always said that as he grew, he became more silent and cold, even to his friends. He was aloof, and he admitted it. And he had achieved what his Father wanted – a cold, ruthless Heir. He didn't regret it, not a single bit. He agreed with his Father, he could never let anyone know his weaknesses. It was a vulnerability. He needed to be strong if he wanted to fight for his Father – his saviour. He couldn't let his brother see his weaknesses and how he was still affected by the cold words of Lily Potter when they met.

He couldn't. It had to be hidden.

"Never," he hissed venomously, like a deadly snake, poised to strike.

A flash of green caught his eyes and he stared once again, into his reflection at the fragments of the mirror lying shattered before him. His features were distorted by the uneven cracks and the mirror whispered of being shattered, just like how he was, broken, but not for long anymore.

"Reparo," he hissed, his tone softening as he saw the broken shards of mirror flying upwards and piecing themselves up together again – a perfect piece.

Magic was the reason for his existence. He loved magic, just performing magic, even simple ones could cheer him up – let him know there was a reason for his existence, as a wizard.

The intense green caught his eyes as he continued to look into the mirror, staring far deeper into the depths of it, unseeingly, unblinkingly.

He wondered.

He wondered if he could ever be whole again after being shattered like the mirror in front of him. How he wished that a simple Reparo could fix him back whole, and make him forget the past – his life at the Potter Manor.

How he wished that he was truly a Riddle.

His father had grown much closer to him than Lily or James could ever hope to be.

If they ever hoped.

The next three days crawled by, slowly. Draco stayed clear from Harry during those days after Harry's outburst. In truth, Draco was in panic himself and Celeste finally managed to persuade the blond that bugging Harry for a solution would not do him good. Reluctantly, Draco stayed at the Malfoy Manor and restrained himself from flooing to Riddle Manor to bugger Harry for a solution. Harry on the other hand was also grateful for the peace but also felt lonely somehow in the big Manor all alone, without his friends' presence around him.

Celeste dropped by occasionally while Harry remained cooped up in his room all day, only coming out for his meals. Lucky for him, the Dark Lord and Bella were away in France for a conference with some high up pureblood witches and wizards there.

Three long days of contemplating, making decisions. Three long days of thinking night after night about the mission before he finally decided that whether he liked it or not, he had to be in the battle of Hogwarts and Celeste would be coming. That meant that the two would have to spend a lot more time practising their duelling. Celeste was powerful, a very powerful dueller but they would surely be outnumbered at Hogwarts and even a powerful witch couldn't duel when outnumbered ten to one.

He sighed. Tomorrow he would be off to Durmstrang. And if nothing changed, then he would speak to his father. Now all he had was to wait for his father's miracle plan to appear before him or he would by hook or by crook, force his way to Hogwarts during the battle.

A loud horn echoed through the ship just as two teens appeared from nowhere into a large platform at the entrance of the ship.

The female teenager relaxed ever so slightly and turned towards her friend. A second later, a horrified gasp echoed within the ship. The luggage that the teen had been carrying dropped to the floor as she pulled her wand out of robes reflexively.

"Harry! Your eye!" Celeste gasped as she pointed her wand to Harry's eye.

A second later, a funny sensation rippled through Harry's eyes. Celeste sighed as she conjured a mirror and handed it over to Harry.

"You forgot your glamour," she said, slightly accusingly.

The hazel brown eyes stared back at him from the mirror. This was the eyes he was accustomed to seeing at school. Years back, when he first started school, Voldemort and him decided that the sharp green eyes were a giveaway to his identity as the Dark Heir and they decided on using a glamour. The rest of his features weren't affected – he was six when the incident took place and he was eleven when he started school. No one would be able to recognize him if his eyes were a deep rich brown.

"Yeah, sorry," he said quietly. "Wasn't thinking about it."

It was true – his mind was wandering off to the mission of Draco's.

He glanced around at the familiar ship he always took to get to Durmstrang Academy. It was huge, but it resembled more of a cruise ship as opposed to a passenger ship. It was fully furnished with a Quidditch Pitch, a Dining Saloon, a Library and cabins for the students to rest while the ship sailed along the oceans.

"Harry, are you okay?" Celeste asked concernedly and he hurriedly turned his back on her, pulling out his wand as he did so.

"Yeah, I'm fine, just tired," he said truthfully. It wasn't really lying though, he justified.

He wasn't tired physically; he was tired mentally. After his rage over Dumbledore, his over active mind had gone back to thinking about Draco's mission. He was sure that this would be a suicide mission for Draco if he didn't help him, and yet, if he went, Celeste or Draco might be injured in the course of a battle.

"Let's go find a compartment then," Celeste replied, glossing over that sticky issue which Harry did not want to dwell on.

Harry wordlessly levitated both their trunks which trailed after them, floating in mid-air, as they stopped and searched for a compartment.

At last, they found one at the back of the ship.

Celeste pushed open the door as she tried to stuff her over-eager owl into the compartment, who as usual protested by screeching and flying wildly in the cage.

"In here, Dragon," she coaxed.

Dragon continued to fly around its cage noisily, and seemed reluctant to get into the compartment. Celeste fixed it with a glare and it immediately stopped its ruckus, and seemed to deflate under Celeste's stern gaze.

Harry felt better at seeing the image in front of him immediately. Pets always made him feel happy because of the carefree life they led. He hadn't had a pet himself, it was just another thing for him to worry after, but he always had a soft spot for Celeste's owl.

When he was young and when Voldemort was away, he would always have Nagini as company in the deserted Riddle Manor. Nagini grew to be something familiar in his life, and he always thanked himself for being a parselmouth to communicate with her. She was like his confidant when he couldn't talk to his friends about his problems.

"I always say that you treat Dragon as a wizard," he said lightly as he settled himself into the seats.

"He is, if you treat him as one," Celeste retorted. "I've always been telling you that animals are just like witches and wizards. You have got to treat them well for them to treat you well too. I always thought that they could understand us. Well, I think Dragon understands me, don't you think so?" Celeste replied, slightly haughtily as she turned away from Dragon and towards him.

Harry sighed in mock-defeat.

"And here I am, thinking if you are really the daughter of the infamous Sebastian Travers, and there you are, Miss Travers, acting like an animal-rights activist," Harry said with a smirk.

Celeste rolled her eyes at Harry.

"You are acting like Draco now," she said disapprovingly. "All his over long speeches on house elves and how they are beneath us. Well, house elves I might agree, but this is different."

"How so?" Harry challenged.

He loved to challenge Celeste's views which were highly detailed and it soon became a past time for him whenever he was bored. The two of them could talk for hours, debating over a single issue – such as should the Dark Heir's identity be made known to public or if Centaurs should be allowed to control over the Forbidden Forest – and those discussions would only end when it was for them to start on their work in Durmstrang or if it happened in Riddle Manor, when Draco appeared and finally begged for them to stop debating and pay him some attention.

Celeste fixed Harry a glare before she launched into her explanation.

"House elves are doomed to serve wizards because of a reason," she said.

"And why is that so...?" he was curious now. He hadn't heard of this bit of information – yet.

"Years ago, when the elves had freedom of their own, they did a terrible injustice to wizards. A betrayal of some sorts. There was the King of Elves," Harry looked at her in disbelief. King of Elves? It seemed out of place in the current Wizarding society to have a King

Elf lording over the other Elves when all elves were under the control of witches and wizards. Celeste ignored him and continued, "The King of Elves had formed an alliance with a powerful Wizard, Octavius.

While Octavius was powerful in his own way, Elf magic is not weak by comparison. But one day, the King of Elves betrayed Octavius. See, Octavius was a research-wizard; he wanted to research on the works of magic, pure magic that runs through the veins of magical beings, and not just wizards alone but magical creatures as well. He believed that if the Magic between wizards and magical creatures could be combined to create a much more powerful species.

It was an experiment that no one had ever tried before. It was the first to be conducted. Together with the King of Elves, he formed alliances with the Vampire Lord and the Goblin Kings, all of whom he bound their own brand of magic together with his own for the experiment."

"I really hate to think of it," Harry interrupted. "It is cruel – it is binding their magic."

Celeste looked amused. Harry could understand why – he had tortured, he had killed, and he found it cruel that a magical creature had its freedom bound to wizards?

"Freedom is different," he defended slightly.

Celeste merely shook her head and her caramel brown hair fell behind her shoulders. She silenced him with a glare and continued, "Octavius almost succeeded but the King of Elves decided to steal his experiment because of his greed. There was a potion Octavius was brewing – it contained the most important, powerful and vital parts or you could say the cores, of Vampires, Wizards, Elves and Goblins, the four most powerful magical beings in the Wizarding World– but before Octavius managed to add the final ingredient into the potion, the greedy King of Elves unknowingly drank the uncompleted potion."

"And he died?"

"No he didn't, but he was severely injured. His internal elfish magic was going against him – interacting with the magic, poisoning him

slowly. Bit like your Le Fey Curse actually. But the only one who knew the actual components of the potion was Octavius himself, but he was unwilling to help the Elf who betrayed his trust. Eventually, under the insistent pleading from the Elves for Octavius to save the King of Elves, Octavius agreed to do it, at a price."

"Binding the magic of elves to wizards," Harry breathed heavily. He was entranced by this old, ancient tale which seemed so unlikely, so long ago. It was as though it came from a different world, so far away.

Celeste nodded, looking sad. "The final component required in the potion was magic. And it was magic that only Witches and Wizards possess – their magical core. Octavius was prepared to sacrifice his core in order to complete the experiment. It was his lifelong work after all, but it was ruined because of the King of Elf's greed. The cure for the King of Elves, unfortunately, requires the magical core of Octavius and Octavius alone, to be effective. While Octavius sacrificed his magic for the King of Elves, the rest of the elves – willingly – sacrificed their freedom to be bound to wizards."

Celeste paused here and stared far away into the distance.

"But what the elves didn't know was that their descendents would also be tied to Wizards. And many people wonder why Wizards are above magical creatures. The answer is simple. The potion affected the Elves for their freedom was sacrificed. However, the Vampires and Goblins who also contributed to the potion also had part of their freedom sacrificed – an after effect of the potion which was uncompleted. The alliance bound the Vampires and Goblins to us wizards for the experimental potion but because it was uncompleted, till this day, they are still bound to us.

And what worse was that, Octavius died shortly after the cure was made for the King of Elves. Afterwards, many tried to concoct the potion but to no avail, hence the alliance never broke, binding the Vampires, Elves, and Goblins to Wizards. Why they were bound to Wizards? Simple, because Octavius was a wizard and he was the leader of the experiment.

While the Elves freedom was fully sacrificed, the Vampires and Goblins still had a bit of authority, except that authority was beneath the wizard's.

In a way, they are also beneath us when we used to be equals. Other magical creatures are not affected for they did not have an alliance with us wizards, but the most powerful ones are under the control of Wizards, and hence, what chance do the rest of the magical creatures stand? This puts us wizards above them."

"So that's why..." Harry realised in a sudden.

Celeste looked at him in puzzlement.

"I was negotiating an alliance with the werewolves," Harry explained and Celeste did not look surprised, but impressed at his power and authority to negotiate an important alliance. "And when we offered them our protection, they were very furious. And now, this explains it all."

"You know, Harry, I'm surprised," Celeste said suddenly.

Harry invited her to continue wordlessly, his interest sparked.

"You know all about curses, Unforgivables, hexes, jinxes, wards, defends and every subject but you don't study much about magical creatures. It could be useful to your future alliances. You and I both know that the Dark Lord would allow you to negotiate the other alliances as well, so it's no excuse," Celeste added. "Shouldn't you study more about magical creatures? You might want to borrow some of my books on Vampires and Goblins," she offered.

Harry cast a glance at Celeste's anticipated look. He didn't want to disappoint his friend much, but he had to admit, he would much rather study on curse-breaking instead.

"I think there won't be a need – until I complete my research on defensive magic first. It has priority," he said smoothly, patronizing her and successfully evading her topic.

Celeste shrugged, not seeming to be bothered by it. The bored, haughty look was back on her face as she stared at him. The haughty look was unintentional but it seemed to run in her veins, having her master the proud pureblood look even when she was young. She was just... aristocratic.

"What?" he said, slightly defensively. He never liked people to stare at him as though he was different or weird.

"Your reaction on the elves, sacrificing their freedom for the selfish King," Celeste said simply. "I was thinking if you experienced that in your life before the Dark Lord took you in. It would... you know, explain your defensiveness"

Harry frowned, not in a least bit offended by Celeste's words. He knew she didn't mean it as sarcasm, not Celeste. If it had been anyone else, he might be mildly irritated. Then he considered Celeste's words. It was true, in a way. He never had the freedom to be himself at the Potter Manor, but Celeste did not know that. All she knew was that he had run away from his family.

"Yeah, I guess so," he said after a long while. "Freedom. It is more important than most people would think of. Well, the purebloods all know it," he looked at her. "You never get freedom either, do you? All that proper speech, actions, your etiquettes and those social gatherings."

Celeste smiled softly. "Harry, it's really a matter of getting used. I suppose yes, it is a little irritating of sorts whenever you can't do what you want especially when you are a girl and are forced to act all nice and lovely, but it's part of being born into a pureblood."

"You don't sound like a Travers at all, Miss Celeste Evangeline Travers," Harry smirked, knowing full well that Celeste detested being treated like a delicate pureblood witch. "Imagine what your father would say when he sees you speaking like this," he added in a mocking tone of horror.

"And neither do you, Mr Riddle," Celeste retorted. "You need to act more commanding and frightening to live up to your name," she laughed but did not go on about the Dark Heir issue. "Or what about Draco? Acting all pompous like a proud peacock Malfoy?"

Harry refrained from snorting. "Peacocks. I always thought that Lucius had an unusual taste."

Celeste laughed freely.

The rest of the journey continued smoothly, neither Harry nor Celeste left their compartment to the other parts of the ship which was usually crowded with students. Their close friends joined them as well, but mostly they talked for a while before they left for the Quidditch Pitch.

Unsurprisingly, Harry Celeste spent hours debating about the Elves freedom. Harry thought that it was cruel for the elves to be enslaved because of their ancestor's greed, but he agreed with Celeste that the sudden change might not be accepted within the Wizarding society, especially by the pureblood witches and wizards.

At last, twilight dawned as the ship arrived at Durmstrang, rising majestically out of the deep blue sea. Having already changed into his Durmstrang robes, Harry conjured his cloak as they made to step out of the ship and into the castle, not bothering with a warming charm for the distance to the castle was a short one.

"We're back, at last," Celeste smiled as the two stared up at the castle. Another year at Durmstrang... before he got to Hogwarts for the battle and the upcoming war.

Students all around them were slowly making their way into the dark castle by the large steel doors. "And to think it's our sixth year. Time passes really quickly. Remember our first year, the first time we took this ship?"

Harry grinned. He could still remember first year when Celeste almost fell into the lake by accident. Thankfully, Harry grabbed her arm before her body hit the water. He could almost remember her expression and her red face in embarrassment.

"Well, you can laugh," Celeste retorted after Harry recounted the incident.

The two of them continued their way up the castle steps and were enjoying the cool night breeze.

Suddenly, a flash of orange light caught Harry's eye. Instinctively from his long years of training, he ducked, pulling Celeste along with him. The trunks that they have been levitating fell messily on to the floor just the streak of light flashed across their heads.

"Well, well, well," a familiar voice sneered from over head. "If it isn't our famed Riddle."

Harry stood up gracefully only to stare into the hostile brown eyes of his arch enemy.

Author's Notes

Thank you to everyone who took the time to read this chapter!

谢谢大家的支持!

9. Cursed Special Senses

Harry merely raised his eyebrows coolly as he surveyed the bulky figure in front of him without much of a flinch. The two stared at each other eye to eye, hazel brown to dull brown. Seconds ticked by.

Dimly, Harry was pleased that he finally grew his potential and became as tall as his arch enemy. It hadn't been nice, looking upwards like a lower to face the person who hated every inch of you and found it a hobby to catch you unawares and perhaps, dunk you into the freezing lake. They were equal at last – eye to eye.

Harry broke the stare and smirked coldly. "Drayvers." He acknowledged coolly.

Isaac Drayvers stared him down, not willing to back down despite the dangerous chill emanating from Harry. Harry really had no patience to deal with this pompous spoilt prince who was so full of blood purity; his temper was running short because of all that had happened lately.

"Riddle," Drayvers spat. "Back for another year, have you?"

Harry could hardly believe Drayvers. Was the Drayvers Heir intent on goading him every time they met in a new term? Apparently so, judging by the determined look from Drayver's eye.

"Why yes, I suppose I am." He sneered back, seemingly unaffected by the jab.

Drayvers took a long hard glance at the unbothered Harry and decided to ignore him. He turned towards Celeste who stood beside Harry, the cold arrogant pureblood mask on her face as she stared into Drayver's eyes without flinching.

Harry had to admire her bravery. The Drayvers were a very well-known pureblood family who had a lot of influence in Wizarding Bulgaria. Sebastian Travers and Isaac Drayvers Senior were good old friends and Sebastian often disapproved the way Celeste ignored the Drayvers Heir. Though, he was proud that his daughter was such good friends with the Dark Lord's powerful on.

Drayvers gave Celeste another glance, between appreciation and slight pleading, though the anger was clearly the primary emotion. "I've said it before and I will say it again. It will do you no good, Celeste Travers, if you were to associate yourself with such mudblood filth," Drayvers said quietly. The rest of Drayvers' gang stood behind him threateningly, agreeing with his views and yet Celeste held her stand as she raised her head and looked directly at Drayvers.

Celeste smiled for a moment and barely concealed hope lit up in Drayvers eyes. Really, Harry thought as he watched from the side. Drayvers was so thick. Then Celeste's eyes hardened and her smile turned sweet – far too sweet. He chuckled on the inside.

"I suppose that I would just have to disappoint you here, Issac," Celeste replied politely, the sarcasm barely hidden in her voice. "As tempting as your offer seems..." her voice trailed off and Drayver's eyes narrowed. "Harrison here and I have much things to do than linger in your ... pleasurable company." Celeste's lips curled upwards into a smug smile.

The crowd sniggered as one but the sniggers were quelled immediately by Drayver's menacing glare.

Drayvers puffed up in rage, his cheeks red from embarrassment and anger. For a moment, Harry thought that he was going to hex Celeste – although he had never done so before despite the number of times Celeste angered and embarrassed him – but then his rage dimmed and he struggled to remain calm and changed tack.

"And are you sure that your father approves of such filth you associate with?" he challenged. His eyes wandered over to Harry in distaste. "Riddle," he said loudly. "A Muggle name. Unworthy." His lips curled into a winning smirk.

"It is not you to decide if Harrison is unworthy," Celeste said dangerously. Her wand was in her hands.

"But it is," Drayvers said in victory. "Riddle here has nothing. A simple command from me and the filthy mudblood would be out of the school. Pathetic. I'm sure his parents would be...heartbroken should he be kicked out of school. Your father would never approve of his company."

The taunting laugh issued from the crowd angered Harry and his last straw broke.

He was not filth nor was his father – the dark lord – a muggleborn, contrary to what Drayvers had just proclaimed. True, no one knew that he was the Dark Heir in Durmstrang except for Celeste but he was just unlucky that Riddle was a muggle name. Or that Drayvers had always wanted Celeste to join his group since day one and took special notice of him since he was the main reason why Celeste still had a friend to back her up in the school. Celeste and Harry had other close friends, but it was Harry who was the leader and held the true power of the group.

He was not pathetic, he growled mentally.

Before he could curse Drayvers into something unrecognizable, Celeste intervened.

"He has not disapproved as of yet and will not do so in the future," Celeste replied coolly. Of course, her father could not label the Dark Lord's son as filth unless he had a death wish.

"Really? I've heard differently," an amused smirk forced its way on Drayver's lips. It was obvious even to the onlookers that he was gambling an attempt on bluffing.

Harry was tired of the game. He calmed his rage and forced himself to look haughty and bored of the conversation though inside, he was steaming from Drayver's insult at his father.

"If you don't mind, Drayvers, Celeste and I have something to attend to immediately," Harry interrupted smoothly. Drayvers looked enraged at the interruption as did the rest of his body guards and he raised his wand threateningly.

Harry eyed the wand casually and disregarded it. He turned back to Drayvers, a supremely unconcerned look on his face. Drayvers looked wary and did not say anything, which was lucky for him.

"Perhaps Beauxbatons is a much suitable school for you?" Harry said coolly and heard a hurriedly stifled laughter from the crowd. "If I am not mistaken, there are plenty of French Veelas there, rather

suited for you. Durmstrang is a school to study powerful magic, not to find your future wife," he said silkily and watched with satisfaction at Drayver's boiling rage which seemed to calm him down.

"Why you – !"

It was no secret either, that Drayvers and Travers had a marriage contract between Celeste and Isaac long ago. The contract was destroyed however, when Harry appealed to his father as to what a troll and dim-witted git Drayvers was and Sebastian had no choice but to forfeit the contract when the Dark Lord requested so.

"You would watch your tongue in future, Riddle, because Travers won't always be here to save your skin," Drayvers broke through his silence. His beady eyes lingered to Harry's right hand where his wand was. It was faintly glowing with his power and looked far more threatening than his own.

Harry smirked, leaning in to Drayvers's ear and said in a dangerous whisper, "It will do you good if you bear in mind not to anger me in the future... The consequences might be dire and no one, including your father would be able to save you," his breath lingered and he watched in satisfaction and amusement as he saw Drayvers shudder.

Harry pulled back, the cold smirk on his lips as he watched the terrified look on Drayvers's face. In that moment when he leaned in, he had unleashed his previously repressed aura slightly and he could feel Drayvers' unconscious desire to gravitate towards him. He had powerful Dark magic and Dark wizards were often captivated by the Dark aura he possessed, drawing them close to him to feel the power... It was like a drug, tempting them to be addicted...

Celeste gave another haughty glare to the rest of the onlookers as she retreated, levitating their trunks. The crowd had enough sense to clear out of their way, but even in the midst of the crowd, Harry spotted another of their friend – Lea Donovan who gave them a wave and a smug smile of victory. Harry allowed a smile to cross his face and the next second, he and Celeste broke through the ranks of Drayvers's followers and continued their way to the castle, as though nothing was out of the ordinary.

Of course, the crowd who were waiting in anticipation at the near fight that almost broke out now broke apart, though excited whispers still discussed about the scene they saw earlier. Muggleborn – or so they assumed – Riddle having, for a second, a certain type of allure that drew them towards him. It was dark and inviting, as though persuading them to gravitate closer towards him, to feel, touch, taste the powerful aura... And now that the aura was repressed, it cleared their mind and gave them some space to think.

A few of the crowd looked disgusted by their previous thoughts and reactions but the rest had awe written all over their faces. A minority even wandered over to Harry but hastily scurried back to the crowd when a murderous glare crossed Harry's face.

One might have thought that he would be famous in Durmstrang where power was held highly in the eyes of everyone, Harry thought slightly irritated. But no one dared to cross Isaac Drayvers and he pretty much got used to spending his solitude life with only a few close friends who decided to ignore Isaac's empty threats of hexing anyone that came into contact with him.

Harry and Celeste entered the silver doors leading into Durmstrang only to be halted by their Professor who was hurrying towards them from the other side of the room. The professor waved her hands and motioned for them to stop. They halted and looked questioningly at each other as the professor made her way over.

"Professor Debra?" Harry said quietly once Professor Debra was close enough to hear him.

Professor Debra was Durmstrang's deputy headmaster and his favourite Professor in Durmstrang – she was in charge of the Duelling Class which was also Harry's favourite class seeing that he absolutely loved duelling.

"Mr. Riddle, Miss Travers," Professor Debra greeted cordially and Celeste smiled. She was also Celeste's favourite teacher. Professor Debra's cheery attitude made her popular among the students.

"I trust that Mr. Drayvers did not give you too much trouble?" Professor Debra inquired, the corners of her lips twitching into a smile. Professors were supposed to be neutral but alright, Professor Debra did favour him over Isaac Dravyers although both of them

were her favourite students. Harry always thought it had to do with Isaac provoking him and starting the fight, but Isaac could be charming when he wanted to as well which was why he was also Professor Debra's favourite student. They might be arch enemies, but they were both certainly talented in Duelling and Professor Debra valued talents.

"Not too much," Harry assured and Professor Debra patted his back. He tried not to shrink away from the physical contact as he composed a perfectly smooth mask to hide his irritation. Professor Debra was young, in her early thirties which was considered young in the Wizarding World, seeing that they lived longer compared to Muggles. Her young age meant that she had unrestrained enthusiasm and did not have an aversion for physical contact like her older colleagues had.

"Still not liking physical contact, eh?" Professor Debra chuckled at Harry who grimaced slightly at being seen through so easily.

"No," he said shortly.

Professor Debra merely chuckled further at his curt reply but dropped her hands in defeat. Celeste turned towards her Professor curiously. Professor Debra now cleared her voice and sounded more business-like.

"This might come as a bit of a surprise to both of you, Miss Travers and of course, Mr Riddle here. It's not our tradition for the Professors to announce it, but given the current circumstances, it was a tad too late for owl post. You see dears, the teachers have all been quite busy organising the Du– well, you will know later – and it is my great pleasure to inform you that you are both," Professor Debra paused here after her lengthy speech and conjured two small items with her wand before thrusting one of each into both Harry and Celeste's outstretched hands, "been made Head Boy and Head Girl." She winked at the pair of them.

Harry and Celeste turned to each other, surprise written on their faces. Harry looked down at the badge in his hands – it was glossy silver with the Durmstrang crest on it.

"Head... Head Girl?" Celeste repeated with wide eyes which were shining with pride.

"Yes, Miss Travers. Sixth years do not usually be made Heads as you very well know, but it is not uncommon. Both yourself and Mr Riddle have both been made the Heads and yes, it is not a hallucination," Professor Debra beamed, seeming unconcerned over Celeste's frown.

Celeste hesitated, looking at the shining silver badge and looked torn for a moment. But she snapped her head up and began slowly and carefully, "Professor, is there any reason why – "

"Why both you and Mr Riddle have both been made Heads?" Professor Debra finished, and turned to look at Harry who said nothing but stared at the badge resting in his hands. He felt pride and joy for his father for this achievement because he knew his father was also made Head Boy in his seventh year at Hogwarts, yet he was also puzzled.

"The answer is simple. It's because if anyone deserves it, it's the both of you," Professor Debra said simply. Harry was aware of her looking intently on him and he quickly composed a smile on his face.

"Mr Riddle, I suggest that you not dwell too much in the matter. What matters is that you and Miss Travers here are fully qualified for the badge and all the teachers here agree," she gave Harry a fond smile.

"Thank you," Harry said politely.

"Not at all," Professor Debra waved off with a merry grin on her young face. "However, I suppose a change of robes would be prudent," Professor Debra waved her wand and Harry and Celeste's robes changed slightly. The previously dark brown Durmstrang robes turned jet black to highlight Harry and Celeste's authority as heads.

Harry instantly understood why.

Durmstrang was classified into two groups. But unlike Hogwarts, they did not sort their students base on their personality. In Durmstrang it was about power, not blood. A pureblood squib would not be able to get into the more advanced group in Durmstrang, but

a powerful muggleborn would be able to. Though, Durmstrang didn't accept muggleborns.

The two groups were simple – there was the smaller group, the Avancés. Those in the Avancés had to be magically powerful enough to undergo a series of tests at eleven in order to be accepted into the group. The larger group was made up of students who couldn't get into the first group. They were the Sorciers. Out of the ten or so students in each level at Durmstrang, only three would be able to enter the Avancés and the rest went to the Sorciers.

This made the Avancés pretty much smug and superior to the Sorciers. It also meant their natural solitude from the rest of the students. Students from the two groups usually talked around their own groups, but Harry and Celeste managed to find Lea Donovan as a friend from the year above them. Lea was also from their group – the Avancés.

In their year, Harry, Celeste, and much to their disgust, Isaac Drayvers were the three selected students.

Their curriculum was not different from the Sorciers, but they had much more advanced classes which also moved at a faster rate. Additional classes were also compulsory, stretching their time spent at Durmstrang. The Avancés wore deep brown robes while the Sorciers wore a lighter brown but only the Head Boy and Head Girl could wear black robes as a form of respect to the authority they possessed.

"I must say, these robes suit you, Mr Riddle. You have a natural authority and command in you and the robes just highlight it perfectly," Professor Debra said with excitement, her eyes on Harry who felt slightly uncomfortable under her gaze. Perhaps the Professor sensed it, because she turned to Celeste with a bright smile. "And you look absolutely charming, Miss Travers. I expect great things from the both of you... you'll find out later," she winked, leaving Celeste looking slightly bemused.

"You alright Harry?" Celeste asked at his stoic expression. He hadn't reacted much, he just stood in spot. He wasn't quite sure why he was acting this way either. Maybe he thought, it was the physical contact that unsettled him. It reminded him of Aunt Bella, who

always ignored his warnings to stop hugging him to suffocation every time they met after weeks of separation.

Then Celeste rolled her eyes slightly, swinging her caramel brown hair over her shoulders to have a clearer access to her robes. She struggle for a moment before the badge was pinned on her robes, the silver clashing with the black nicely.

"Honestly, you ought to put on your badge," Celeste muttered. She flicked her wand and the badge flew out of his hand into hers.

Celeste held the badge up to his eye level threateningly. That caught his attention and he narrowed his eyes at her.

"Put this on or I'll help you," Celeste announced loftily.

He faked a look of mortification. "Very funny," he said and snatched the badge out of her hands.

He worked on pinning the badge onto his robes quietly as Celeste chatted on. He almost growled. He knew why she was being extremely talkative today. Celeste always tried to make him speak more whenever he got too quiet and cold for her liking. He appreciated it but happiness eventually faded from his life since he was young. His childhood was short; he had matured quickly and studied the war since young. He only felt comfortable talking to his father... the one person he thought understood him the most.

"You ought to cheer up a little. In case your brilliant mind hasn't caught on, something big is going to happen." Celeste said. The two of them walked towards the direction of the Dining Hall where they met up with the other students heading in the direction as well.

They rounded a corner and Celeste dropped her voice slightly at the crowd of students surrounding them, each absorbed in their own conversation.

"Remember what Professor Debra was saying? The things the teacher planning?" she paused slightly and he was listening intently now, his curiosity captured. "That could be it you know – the thing that the Dark Lord has in mind for ... the mission," her voice dropped to a whisper. "The bigger plan...it might be."

He cast a wary glance around the people walking around before turning back to her. "You think so?" he considered for a minute. "Yeah, maybe." He agreed. "I suppose we'll find out later, at the feast then."

"You need to stop worrying," Celeste said for the umpteenth time. "It will work out, I'm sure of it..." Her voice went funny at this. "It's almost as if I could..." her voice faltered and lost its usual confidence. Harry invited her to carry on with a persuasive smile. Celeste seemed to sigh before she said hesitantly, "It's almost as if... I could feel the outcome of it, the death of ... you know... Dumbledore. I am almost certain that there would be a battle and...an omen, someone's going to be injured heavily and I think I know it's – well – but ... the casualties... the loss and... a big revelation or something... I've got this feeling it's... well, but I – it just seems to me that it will work out eventually..."

Harry stopped in his tracks to stare at her. The people around him glared when he blocked the corridor and he quickly pulled Celeste to aside.

"You got this feeling?" he asked quickly. Could it be? Could Celeste be...? The Travers were well known for it after all... Celeste's grandmother had been famed for that, her ability, could Celeste? He knew from Celeste that her grandmother's ability started out from the feelings, the almost certain knowings...

"Oh Merlin," Celeste gasped as she caught on to Harry's double meaning. "I can't be... but it's impossible..."

"I think you are," Harry said grimly. "But it may not be bad. We could change it, sort of."

"But Harry, sixth sense! It isn't very reliable. It's not like a Seer or a Prophet," Celeste said urgently. "It cannot be relied on; the Seers have a much more definite futuristic vision, but mine or grandmother's... it's more of a sixth sense, the knowing of what will happen, a feeling... and sometimes it might not be what we think it is, it might be something else, something different. Yet this time... I feel that something destructive would happen, like a major battle... revelations...I can't brush that feeling off."

"So a battle then?" he said, and the two of them joined the crowd, quickly walking to the Dining Hall where they could find a seat with the Avancés for some privacy.

They quickly spotted an empty spots and settled in while waiting for the rest of the students to get into their seats. Harry cast a quick glance around them. The table for Avancés was fairly empty, most of the students were making their way in. Up at the Teachers' table, only Professor Debra and two other Professors were present. Headmaster Karkaroff took his time as usual...

"Yes," Celeste said immediately once they were sure there were no eavesdroppers. "It's just this overwhelming feeling, I can almost be sure, except it's just a feeling and no concrete proof. But... yet I am almost certain. It's kind of irritating actually, to know it yet you don't really believe it."

Harry shrugged as he considered. "It doesn't hurt to know," he replied. At the sight of Celeste biting her lips in worry, he smiled softly, reassuringly.

"Alright, we'll just have to make sure that there aren't any casualties and losses on our sides... At least not major and serious injures..." he said quickly. Celeste relaxed slightly at his assuring tone and he now gave a full blown smirk which looked like a grin.

"Stop looking so nervous," he joked slightly, trying not to show how tense he felt beneath it. "You're scaring the terrified first years."

Celeste spared the first years a glance before she trained her eyes on him.

"It's really starting isn't it... the war, and we're going to be... right in it," Celeste whispered. He felt his smirk drop and he could feel the depths of the emotions running beneath her words.

Of course Harry knew how she felt, to know that she would be one of those involved directly at the war. He already had suspicions that Draco and Celeste were going to be marked by his father sometime this year. This meant that they would be Death Eaters, right in the centre of the war, alongside with him. It seemed like no matter which side he went to, he was going to be in the war. With the Light, he

would be fighting beside his brother, protecting him. Now, he would be fighting with his father because he wanted to.

He might have hoped that his friends would be spared by his Father from being marked, but his loyalty towards his father accepted that they needed more recruits and Celeste was very powerful. Draco was powerful in his own aspects and he had the influence they needed.

Yet he also knew that Celeste was not worried for herself. She was worried for him, Draco, her father, her friends...the safety of people she knew and loved. She didn't relish in terror, torture or destruction. Sure, she had practice on the Unforgivables along with Draco and himself before, but she didn't love the sport like his Aunt Bella did.

"It will turn out okay," he said bracingly. "We will emerge victorious. We will, definitely." He said fiercely. He would not think of the other option... his brother emerging victorious, his winning smug smile as he glared down at Harry, lying broken, bloodied on the floor...taunting him... his father, losing the war... he could not allow that to happen, no he couldn't.

The world seemed so desolate and cold... full of destruction that was the war... it wasn't the Dark side that was fighting... he understood his father's ideals... Dumbledore's insistence to work alongside muggles would render the Wizards wiping out of existence when the muggles technology finally broke through... they needed to enforce their laws his father planned, to make sure that the wizards were safe, forever... the Light side didn't agree, they thought it ridiculous, but it wasn't... it was for the safety of wizards if they wanted their continued existence... their existence...existence...

"But at what price?" Celeste interrupted his thoughts, her voice heavy with despair.

Harry froze in his jumbled thoughts of terror and the destruction of the world. But at what prize? Celeste's question hung in the air, Harry not trusting himself to reply. Life was so cruel, he hated the war, he hated it, he wanted to end it soon, he wanted to end it himself, rid the World of his father's enemies and end the war.

Harry and Celeste sat in silence. In their despondent conversation, the hall had filled with people. The Dining Hall was now crowded with students all in different shades of brown, save for them, in black robes. The buzzing chatter made Harry's head throb and he looked up only to catch the eye of Isaac Drayvers who was sitting a few seats diagonally opposite him.

Isaac's eyes trailed down to the shining badge gleaming on his robes with a scowl. The next moment, his eyes wandered over to Celeste, who did not notice his stare. Harry glared at him, his aura rolling off in threatening waves and the people around him seemed alarmed at the abrupt slight suffocation and were looking around in panic. No one noticed the stare down between Harry and Isaac.

Harry quickly restrained himself just as Isaac sneered and turned away, back to the mindless conversation he had with his cronies. He exhaled in relief, pleased that he hadn't lost control. Over the years... he had developed a rather unusual taste of pleasure at cursing people whenever he felt angry, sad or desperate.

"Harry, the Headmaster is here," Celeste voice seemed distant and far away.

Harry tore his eyes off Isaac and turned to the Teacher's table. There, sitting in full glory was Igor Karkaroff, in his newest piece of fur coat. The Professors around him nodded and he surveyed the students in mild arrogance before he pointed the wand to his jaw.

His voice was now magnified ten times and he rang in the room, drawing the attention of every student. "Welcome, welcome back to another year at Durmstrang," Headmaster Karkaroff said in a booming voice. "First years, you may take a seat with the Sorciers before your official sorting begins tomorrow." He gave a nod to Professor Debra who directed the nervous first years over to the seats left open. Once the first years were seated comfortably, he continued.

"As some of you might know... or not, since it is highly classified information that has only been decided on this week between the Headmasters of Hogwarts and Durmstrang," Karkaroff puffed out his chest slightly in arrogance. Several purebloods nodded impressively at Karkaroff, whom they believed was an esteemed member of the Dark Lord's inner circle, whom they very much admired.

Harry refrained from rolling his eyes at them. It seemed like he was always doing that. Karkaroff held no major importance within the Inner Circle; it was his position at Durmstrang that guaranteed him a position within the Inner Circle.

"... due to the success of the Triwizard tournament between Hogwarts, Durmstrang and Beauxbatons two years before, Hogwarts and Durmstrang have decided to host an exchange programme. Beauxbatons have declined to take part owing to the fact that they have to host visitors coming from China."

Excited whispers met Karkaroff's words. Harry and Celeste found each other's eyes as they gasped in disbelief.

"It would be held at Hogwarts due to certain reasons of which there are no need for you to know," Karkaroff's eyes lingered at Harry. In that instant, Harry realised that Celeste's suspicions were correct and this was his father's plan.

His father had set Karkaroff up with this 'exchange programme' to bring together Hogwarts and Durmstrang together, making the exchange programme to be held at Hogwarts. Ingenious, this meant that Durmstrang students would be able to stay at Hogwarts for a year again, giving Harry and Celeste full access to the Vanishing Cabinet, to help Draco in his mission.

Harry concealed the smirk that was forming on his lips. Excellent, he hissed to himself quietly. His father had a plan, as usual. His burden was over, but that only meant...

"The battle," he whispered, too softly for everyone but Celeste to hear. She turned to him.

"Your gut feeling," he stated simply and saw her eyes widen up in surprise. "It... might be true. There's a definite chance. If it's an exchange programme, I would love to see them forbid us from going," he said in victory. He could help with Draco's mission. His friend would be ecstatic and with himself there, he felt much more at ease.

He would not allow the mission to fail, not with him there personally. He knew this mission was very important to his father and to the

Dark Side. Dumbledore's death was necessary for their rule over the Wizarding World.

Celeste's eyes lit up in hope and satisfaction. "It's settled then. We're going to Hogwarts," she fought to keep her voice quiet but the excitement and trepidation was barely hidden in her voice.

Harry inclined his head slightly and turned back to Karkaroff who was still talking on and on, basking in the attention that the students showered on him.

"However, Headmaster Dumbledore of Hogwarts have implemented a rather fitting suggestion," Karkaroff drawled smugly and Harry refrained from cursing the over obnoxious Headmaster.

"He wishes to host a Duelling Tournament during our stay at Hogwarts. All Durmstrang students going for the exchange would automatically be in the Round One of the tournament. Ten students from Durmstrang would be going and competing, and ten would be selected from Hogwarts. Ten, from each school and only sixth years and above are qualified." Karkaroff finished and watched in satisfaction as angry titters burst out across the room, particularly from the younger Avancés students.

Most of the Sorciers merely hung their heads down, in slight defeat but the older Sorciers were alert with hopes on their faces. Exchange and tournaments which Durmstrang had a limited number of participations were usually in priority for the Avancés seeing that they were more powerful.

However, the current limit meant that all the Avancés would be accepted for there were only six of them from sixth and seventh year and hence, some Sorciers would have the chance to take part. This explained the anger coming from the younger Sorcier students for they were not qualified for the once in a few decade chances of participating in such events.

"As such, a fair chance would be given," Karkaroff leered.

It was obvious to Harry what 'fair chance' meant and he felt slightly repulsed by Karkaroff's false promises to the Sorciers.

"An Inter School Duelling Tournament would begin next week and Durmstrang would select the top ten qualified students in Duelling for the exchange programme. While the students in Group Avancés would stand a higher chance, students in Sorciers stand a chance to participate in the tournament for a chance to be chosen. Ten spots await you. Sign up sheets are available with Professor Debra. Latest by Wednesday, no exceptions for the Duelling Tournament will begin on Friday."

He waved a hand at Professor Debra who smiled at the students. Many students clapped and Karkaroff looked slightly jealous at Professor Debra's popular support within the students. He quickly spoke again in his hearty voice to capture the attention of the students.

"And do not be discouraged, those of you who do not qualify. This is after all, a chance like no other and only the best can be taken. We would do Durmstrang proud by winning the Duelling Tournament," Karkaroff continued and cheers erupted from the students as they chanted 'Durmstrang' until Karkaroff, with a pleased smile on his face, silenced them.

The rest of Karkaroff's speech was mundane but Harry did not bother much. Even when it was time for the feast, he hardly seemed aware. He felt oddly free and unburdened even though it was only a small step in their progress.

They would be going to Hogwarts, where Dumbledore was.

By the looks of Celeste's slightly vacant and dazed expression, he knew she must be feeling as relieved as he was, after days of worrying. All he knew was that he was right to trust his father who did indeed have a bigger plan. His worry for Draco's mission was unfounded for he would be there, helping Draco alongside with Celeste.

He grinned at Celeste, who beamed in return, both feeling light hearted at the change in events.

Despite the fact that he would be going to Hogwarts for a bigger reason other than for a simple exchange programme, Harry felt excited. He would be able to experience how Hogwarts was like for

he was far too young to participate when the Triwizard Tournament was hosted.

He would never trade Durmstrang for Hogwarts, but even Draco's constant praises of his school made Harry curious as to what Hogwarts would be like. He knew Hogwarts indulged in comfort but their classes did not appeal much to him. Hogwarts was strictly Light Magic only whereas Durmstrang taught both Dark and Light magic. Besides, he appreciated the extra lessons he had as an Avancés at Durmstrang. They taught things that even a full-grown wizard might not have even come across.

But Hogwarts...something about the ancient castle mystified Harry whenever he saw the castle when at Diagon Alley. It was mysterious and had a strange sense of belonging to him.

With an abrupt start, Harry realised that Hogwarts was truly where he belonged... if he had never left the Potters. All Potters went to Hogwarts with a few exceptions who schooled at Beauxbatons but he was the first Potter to be at Durmstrang.

Durmstrang was classified as a 'Dark Arts' school to many Hogwarts students which included his Potter Ancestors.

And yet his brother would be there at Hogwarts, and it would be the first time in ten years that he would see his brother face to face. His brother often appeared on the Prophet as did his parents, but he hadn't seen them for a long time.

He wondered if his brother or his parents would recognise him and highly doubted it. If he didn't know better, he would have thought that his parents were missing him, but no. They were basking in Joshua's glory of the Chosen One and his limited number of photos taken in Godrics Hollow was probably missing or burned.

At the same time, Harry felt rather miffed with the Wizarding World. All they had for proof was a dusty prophecy that his brother could defeat the Dark Lord, but they worshipped him like a God even if he hadn't duelled with the Dark Lord before. He thought about his father's duelling skills and he felt better at once. There was no way his brother could defeat his father.

Even Dumbledore would have trouble, much less his brother. He was sure that he was almost equal in terms of magic compared to Dumbledore. He practiced on his Le Fey Curse with his father, both of them learning to master and conquer the Curse.

Within Harry lay the magic he absorbed from several traitorous Death Eaters who betrayed his father. Both his father and he had their magical core expanding by leaps and bounds, attributing to his father's confidence in the war. Harry also thought that this new form of punishment by ripping a wizard of his magic was worse than the Cruciatus Curse and his father relished in using it whenever he was in a rage.

"You know Harry, Hogwarts is where the Dark Lord studied in," Celeste voice came from far away, interrupting his mindless musings. "It would be interesting wouldn't it? Visiting the school that the most famous Dark Lord once called home?"

With a jolt, Harry turned to her.

She was right, he thought as he considered her words. Hogwarts was his father's home, where his father carved out his future by his own hands. Hogwarts was where his father build up his base, learned of his noble ancestry and became the most feared Dark Lord of all times.

And Harry would follow in his steps.

Author's Notes

Alright. So – Slytherin/Ravenclaw/Gryffindor?

Yes, Hogwarts do not sort foreign students, but this will not be the Tri-wizard tournament. It is more of an exchange programme with the Duelling Tournament as the main focus. It's for 'International Magical Co-operation' so sorting students will make it more of an exchange programme so students won't be mingling with those of their own school.

Back to topic... what house do you want Harry to be sorted into? Actually, I find Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Gryffindor quite possible choices. I can't imagine him in Hufflepuff *evil grin* can you? It doesn't suit him, powerful and dark in Hufflepuff although he does

have loyalty. I doubt the hat would sort him there. But he is definitely Slytherin, he has Ravenclaw qualities and he is brave/reckless as well.

Leave a review for the house you want Harry to be in since I won't be putting up a poll. It's more of what's your opinion kind of thing and I have difficulties debating which one to put him in. Well, Slytherin and Gryffindor are good choices and Ravenclaw fits him. So. Yes.

& thank you to everyone who reviewed. and to those of you who asked, chinese is my mother tongue actually. :]

10. Where Freedom Resides

Friday approached quickly.

It was as though the whole week had flown past and Harry was awake even before the sun was up. He lay in his bed, immersed in his thoughts.

The classes at Durmstrang seemed to fly past the last few days – Blood Magic, Ward Magic, Charms, Dark Arts, Light Magic, Defensive Magic, Potions, Transfiguration, Astronomy, Magical Beasts and Duelling, all of which kept Harry up late at night to study. Both he and Celeste sat through the classes edgily, their minds wandering off to Hogwarts.

Now Harry missed the classes that he would surely be missing. At Hogwarts, Professor Debra and a few other Professors would be following them to teach them Blood Magic and Ward Magic so they wouldn't be missing out on those but it didn't feel the same learning those advanced magic at Hogwarts instead of Durmstrang. Durmstrang students would be taking the lessons with Hogwarts for the subjects they were taking and which Hogwarts taught like Potions, Transfigurations and Charms. The rest would be taught by their Professors.

And today... it was the day where the Durmstrang held its interschool duelling tournament which was also his link to Hogwarts. He wasn't worried about his performance at duelling, but rather, Hogwarts suddenly seemed so close to him. Nervous was a better word though Harry hardly felt nervous throughout his life. Yet the prospect of actually being in Hogwarts was much more exciting than he would admit it to be.

The selected students would be off to Hogwarts just a week later.

There, he would meet Draco and his brother, mother and father. He wondered vaguely if they would recognise him. Surely they would? They had spent six years living together after all, despite the last two years after the Prophecy being made wasn't happy. Then he remembered that he wasn't the carbon copy of James Potter any longer. He mentally thanked his father for that once again – it wasn't nice wearing a pair of thick glasses even at an age of six. His

brother seemed to escape the Potter family curse though. Joshua never had any problems with his eye sight for which he always envied him for.

The day before, Professor Debra had given tips on duelling to the students. Nothing that Harry hadn't heard before and he amused himself by laughing inwardly at the terrified looks of his classmates who were struggling hard to concentrate. Celeste chided him for not paying attention though he assured her that Lucius had already covered these in their training. It seemed like the whole sixth and seventh year all wanted to take part in the Interschool Duelling to get to Hogwarts. Harry didn't understand their fascination with Hogwarts, but he also didn't understand why Hogwarts seem to mystify him either.

Two hours later, Harry rose from bed, showered, and went down to the common room which the Head boy and girl shared. He sat on the couch by the fire, waiting patiently for Celeste, twirling his wand in his hands.

Classes were cancelled on that day; the students were all gathering at the Duelling Arena that Durmstrang was proud of. The Duelling Arena was as big as the Dining Hall and had protective barriers and enchantments circling it, protecting the onlookers from getting injured by a wayward curse. Occasionally the barrier would be torn down by a particularly nasty curse and some unfortunate student would end up at the hospital but Harry wasn't banking on that sort of incidents to spoil the tournament. Only the best could be chosen.

"Harry?" Celeste's voice rang from the steps leading to the Head Girl's room.

She was descending down the spiral steps, her dark brown hair tied up in a tight bun in preparation for the upcoming duel. It hadn't been nice for Celeste when her long swinging hair had been grabbed by an opponent or set on fire during their early days of Durmstrang. Of course, Harry quickly hexed the unfortunate person who laughed at Celeste.

"You're early. Paranoid much?"

Harry rolled his eyes casually as he rose from the couch, his wand remaining in his robes. "Yes, I am absolutely terrified to be in a duel with Drayvers and the Sorciers."

"Want to practice before the actual duel then? It's still early," Celeste proposed. "I'm itching for a duel. We hadn't duelled since last year and you were all cooped up in the Riddle Manor last summer and at the Malfoy Manor Draco wasn't in the mood to do anything but moan and grouch."

"You're the one that is paranoid, duelling in the early morning," Harry grumbled but drew out his wand all the same.

The duel started with Celeste casting a bone shattering curse at Harry which he dodged. Both Celeste and Harry suffered minor cuts and bruises but Harry was better off. His training with his father paid off but he admitted that Celeste was an excellent dueller and a worthwhile competitor though she wasn't his match.

Half an hour later, the two teens were exhausted at the duel. Their wands were flying at lightning speed and there was no hesitation in the duelling. Several items in the common room were not as lucky as the two and were destroyed, such as the couch and chairs missing a leg or being blasted apart. Exhaustedly, Harry rose from damaged couch as he waved his wand, fixing the destroyed furniture after the short duel.

"I think we would make it in," Celeste laughed as she joined him in repairing the broken items. Her tightly braided hair was coming loose and she fixed it with a tap of her wand. "Hard not to, isn't it?"

Harry nodded as he waved his wand in a flourish and watched with satisfaction as the last of the damage were repaired back to its original state before casting a last glance at the room and heading out to the Dining Hall for breakfast.

The Dining Hall was packed full of students and Professors like, all of them absorbed in their own conversation. Harry spotted Lea and hurried towards her with Celeste. Lea was at the far end of the Avancés table, sitting alone and looking slightly nervous. Her tanned face betrayed her emotions as she tapped her fingers on the table, waiting for the duelling to start.

"Lea," Celeste called as they neared the table.

Lea looked up and flashed a smile at Celeste. "Celeste," she greeted. "See you've both prepared," she said, observing the healed cut on Celeste's face.

"Not much. Harry won as usual," Celeste replied the unasked question. "It was exhausting but nothing beats a great duel. Are you excited to go to Hogwarts?"

Celeste and Harry settled in and began to eat their breakfast as they talked on about Hogwarts. Lea had a younger sister at Hogwarts and she was excited to meet the school her sister had always talked about. Harry could relate to that by the long adventures Draco always recounted to him and Celeste over the summer holidays.

A loud voice interrupted their conversation and the students all looked up to the direction of the voice. Professor Debra was standing in the middle of the Teacher's platform as she addressed the sixth and seventh years.

"Students wishing to take part in the Interschool Duelling Tournament please make your way to the Duelling Arena now."

Several students rose out of their seats and the loud buzz of excitement filled the Dining Hall.

Fluidly, Harry rose with Celeste and Lea, joining the crowd of students at the doorway leading to the Duelling Arena in the adjacent room from the Dining Hall. When they reached the Arena, Harry saw that the usual protective enchantments were up. The younger students surrounded the Duelling platform, undisguised curiousness and anticipation on their eager faces. Mildly, Harry was irritated by the vast number of audience.

The minute the students settled down, Professor Debra clapped her hands to attract the attention of the students.

"Those wishing to participate in the Duelling Tournament, up on the platform now!" she called loudly and several students cheered for their friends.

The students all scrambled to jump on to the platform, hoisting one leg above the other. Harry and Celeste took a running jump onto the platform and Lea followed them from behind. Professor Debra nodded at the twenty or so students at the huge platform almost the size of the Dining Hall and gestured for them to come closer to her.

"This will be a free duel. The last ten students standing would be the selected students," Professor Debra began. "Rules are clear. No Unforgivables or Dark Curses above the scale of four allowed in the duel. Disarming does not equal to disqualification. Like Hogwarts, the protective enchantments will banish you from the platform should you be defeated."

The loud voice of Isaac Drayvers could be heard as he drawled, "Defeated meaning? If it isn't disarming, what would it be, Professor?"

Professor Debra smiled at Isaac as she addressed his question. "Excellent question, Mr Drayvers," she said calmly. "Disarming does not equal to disqualification as wandless magic is allowed."

Several students gasped and looked at each other in fluster. It was clear to Harry that they hadn't mastered any form of wandless magic yet.

"Yes, wandless magic," Professor Debra confirmed and raised her voice slightly at the agitated voices of the students. They immediately turned towards her. "A wizard or witch cannot always depend on their wand. Wandless magic is an advantage that a powerful wizard has," Professor Debra's eyes seem to find Harry as she said this. "However, being knocked out or suffering from major injuries will equal to disqualification. Injuries such as broken bones, large cuts and gashes and petrification will lead to disqualification."

More agitation coming from the students who were protesting that wandless magic wasn't taught at Durmstrang. Harry waited patiently for the Professor to address their petty concerns. At last, the questions stopped as Harry raised his hand. Celeste looked at him.

"When would the duel end?" he asked simply.

Several students rolled their eyes at him and gave him looks of exasperation. It was clear that they wanted to be part of the top ten

and were not concerned when the duel would actually be over. They would relax once they got into the top ten selected positions – an easy target for him.

Professor Debra silenced them with a wave of her hands as she turned to him. "The duel will end, Mr Riddle, with the last person standing. As an interschool duel, the winner of the free duel will be the champion for the Interschool Tournament and would represent Durmstrang over at Hogwarts."

Harry inclined his head, not responding.

"The duel will begin when I give the command," Professor Debra said as she exited the duelling platform and joined the students outside the platform. "On the count of three. One, two..."

Hands tensed on several pairs of wands as the owners gripped the wooden stick tightly. Faces were set in determination as the duellers quickly spread apart, away from each other to have clear space and aim. Harry nodded to Celeste as he went to the opposite end of the duelling platform. He didn't want to stay there and duel her for the rest of the tournament for their duel would take a long time to be over.

"Three."

Flashes of lights erupted in the duelling arena. Harry ducked as he rolled on the floor, casting a petrifying hex on an unfortunate Sorcier sixth year who gave a shriek of surprise as her petrified body was flung out of the platform and to the crowd of students awaiting below. Her enraged expression was one to remember as she looked furious at being disqualified from the battle even before she had a chance to react.

Harry did not stop to admire his work but wasted no more time as he was engaged in a battle with two other Sorcier students from the year above him. Jets of light issued from their wands as they duelled. Harry attacked on the offensive, casting curses one after another. The two Sorciers barely had time to defend themselves and started running the opposite direction upon realising that they had no chance of winning him. Harry was having none of that cowardly behaviour.

"Momentum Aresto!" he said loudly, pointing his wand at the two Sorciers who were running from him.

He watched with great satisfaction as the Sorciers slowed down, having been hit by a slowing charm. He detested cowards.

Adrenaline ran through his veins at the sight of the battle. He dodged from his nearing opponents and made his way to the Sorciers calmly. With a cold expression, he jabbed his wand at the back of the Sorcier, yelling "Stupefy!" as the body was blasted ten feet away from him. He quickly turned to the other Sorcier who backed away in panic at the sight of his companion being blasted away. The Sorcier raised his wand limply as he attempted to cast a disarming hex on him. Harry gave a wide smile as the Sorcier was blasted out of the platform as well.

His heart was thumping, he loved the duel, he didn't want it to end...

Scanning the surroundings, Harry noted that about fourteen students still remained. Celeste was on the far end of the platform as she duelled three students at once, all of whom considered her a threat and were trying to eliminate her. Even as he ran to assist her, a well aimed Expluso managed to knock two of them out of their feet as they were banished out of the enchantments as well.

"Pefricto!" he snarled at an Avancés who attempted to attack Celeste from her back. The student slumped down onto the floor and with another nonverbal curse, the body went flying out of the enchantments.

One Avancés down and there were five left.

Suddenly, Celeste's shout alerted him. "Harry, behind you!" Celeste shouted desperately while she duelled with her opponent.

Harry ducked as a flash of light seared past his head and quickly turned and cursed under his breath. Drayvers stood behind him, as he raised his wand to his head. Harry froze inwardly.

"Got you this time, Riddle. You can't always run!" the loud mocking voice of Drayvers rang in the room.

The audience laughed as one, all of them craning their necks to witness the fall of Riddle. He, Harry was famed for his superb duelling skills and now, he was about to be disqualified under the hands of his arch enemy...

Or not.

Harry was aware of his heart leaping. One wrong move and he would be disqualified. He couldn't, he wouldn't. He slowly tilted his head upwards to stare into Drayvers's eye which were trained on him. Drayvers's lips twisted into a gleeful smile.

Harry closed his eyes for a second, internal conflict. The duel... the duel...

It was as though his nerves were made of steel. In that moment before Drayvers could cast his hex, Harry made up his mind. The words of his father came back to him... To use any chance possible regardless of the consequences. It sounded reckless for a Slytherin, but then again, what choice did he have?

Well this is it, Harry thought grimly.

Instead of cowering under Isaac and waiting for the curse to strike him, Harry swung his leg on the floor and tripped Drayvers in one clean swipe. Drayvers fell onto the platform with a yell of panic followed by several curses.

Harry didn't give him the chance to recover. He was aware of his heart roaring with triumph and approval even as he leapt up and away from Drayvers as he pointed his wand at Drayvers.

"It didn't have to end this way," he said quietly, coldly.

Drayvers gave an inarticulate roar of rage as he struggled to his feet but with a bang from Harry's wand, he stumbled and fell backwards. Blood squirted out of the jagged gash on Drayver's wand arm as he was hit with the curse.

"Excruto," Harry said calmly, hatred burning in his veins.

He watched, pleased, as the bone in Drayvers's left knee broke and he let out a strangled yell of pain. With another flick of his wand, he

banished Drayvers away from him just as a shrill cry of agony rang in the room.

"Arrghh! Help! Someone! Help!" Drayvers shrieked in desperation and sunk on to the floor, cradling his injured knee. His face contorted into one of utmost agony as his screams reverberated off the walls of the Duelling Arena. The next moment, the protective enchantments blasted him out of the platform like the many students before him.

Drayvers fell onto the floor with a loud thud followed by another yell of agony. Professor Debra rushed towards him, her wand in hand as she set to heal him.

Harry smirked, ignoring Drayvers and moved over to survey the battle scene and was silently disappointed when he realised that Drayvers was one of the last ten students although he was now disqualified.

There were four students left, Celeste, himself and two other Avancés from seventh year. They were grouped together, Celeste and himself against the two seventh years. Sweat was pouring down their faces; their wands were gripped tightly in their hands.

Their eyes locked with each other's, determination to emerge victorious on their faces.

"Riddle," sneered the bulkier seventh year as he tried to cast a nonverbal spell at Harry.

Harry deflected the spell with ease. Neither of them made a move to continue the attack. Harry was biding his time, like a deadly serpent, venomous and waiting for the opportunity to strike.

Striking for the kill.

The silence resumed.

They were moving in circles now, Celeste and himself on one end of the circle, slowly circling their opponents. Celeste looked haughty, a winners expression clear on her aristocratic face by the way she sneered at the two casually.

The onlookers watched the duel with trepidation even though it was clear which side would emerge victorious. Harry was practically radiating power and Celeste had a confident look on her face.

"Got through the battles by luck did you?" the seventh year taunted after a while. Neither of the people made a move to attack – yet. His friend looked at him worriedly, an unasked question in his eye. The taunting seventh year shook his head slightly in command but Harry caught it.

Harry aimed his wand at the seventh year. "Perhaps I did." He said in reply. The seventh year eyed his wand, a nervous glance on his face which he pretended to shrug off quickly. "But I certainly do feel that I could win this battle."

The seventh year had his face contort into an ugly grimace in his rage at being insulted. Harry barely had a second to think before he realised that his plan worked. The seventh year raised his wand and as he did so, two jets of light emerged from his wand.

The fight resumed.

Pushing Celeste aside, Harry ducked by rolling on the floor, taking aim even as he dodged the curse. He watched in horror as the curse missed and cursed in his head.

A streak of light flashed past him and caught his robes, burning it slightly before Celeste extinguished it.

"That's the best you can do?" Harry said coolly as he stood, facing his opponent.

He was aware of the cheers from the crowd as the seventh year seemed to gain the upper hand but he blocked that out.

From his position, he rolled aside as he quickly aimed his wand at the figure before him. He didn't think, he didn't have a chance to. All he did was to attack with the curse that first came into his mind.

Sure enough, a second later, ropes emerged from his wand and immediately bound themselves on the seventh year. His friend, upon seeing this development, immediately abandoned his fight with Celeste and rushed over to unbind him, seemingly forgetting that he

had a wand in his hand. His wand clattered to the side as he quickly worked to unbind the ropes. Celeste stood beside him, amusement on her face at the two seventh years before them.

"Your wand, Lionel! Your bloody wand, you idiot!" shrieked the seventh year at his friend who was kneeling next to him. "Your wand, quickly you fool!"

A look of mortification crossed the face of Lionel as he dove for his wand. Celeste, seeing what he was about to do, quickly shot a hex at it and it flew out of sight. A triumphant smirk flashed across Celeste's face and Harry grinned at her in approval. She nodded quickly and turned back to Lionel.

The frozen Lionel turned to face Celeste and quickly backed away. Harry advanced towards him. Sweat matted his hair. Victory tasted so sweet.

"I don't suppose you know wandless magic, do you, Lionel?" Harry said clearly, watching as the horror grew on Lionel's face. He enjoyed this, the taunting and scaring. They deserved it.

Celeste joined him, abandoning the bound seventh year who was still shrieking at his friend in vain. The robes were bound tightly and could not be taken off without magic.

"Do it, Harry," Celeste said solemnly, as though Harry was about to kill off Lionel.

Harry sighed at Celeste's sarcasm which was hidden in her words. Lionel didn't seem to think that Celeste was joking and meant disqualifying him instead of cursing him into something unrecognizable though. If possible, the terrified look on Lionel's face increased by ten fold.

"Please. Please, no!" Lionel shrieked as he raised his hand to cover his face. "No no no," he muttered quickly, his eyes alive with fear, his jaw slack and worry crossing his face –

Harry raised his wand and said quietly, "Stupefy."

He was aware of Lionel's long drawn scream as the light careened towards him. The scream ended abruptly as the red jet of light hit

Lionel's face head on as he fainted backwards, landing with a loud thump on the floor. The crowd groaned and laughed as one as Lionel was blasted out of the platform with a spin.

Harry turned to face Celeste as the two of them ignored the crowd and turned back towards the rude seventh year who taunted Harry earlier on. Harry recognized the seventh year as Joseph Polonski, one of the members of Drayver's gang who taunted Harry. Polonski was one of the leaders of the gang in fact.

Harry and Celeste raised their wands high up. A flash of fear now appeared on Polonski's face. The crowd stopped their excited murmurings and all of them looked towards the cowering Polonski.

"You deserved it," Harry said to the cowering Polonski. Polonski looked up at him, his eyes wide with fear and he was shaking.

"No – no," Polonski tried pleading. Harry ignored him and turned towards Celeste.

"Together," Harry said to Celeste who nodded.

They held their wands high and –

"Mr Riddle," a loud voice interrupted.

Harry and Celeste turned to the voice which belonged to Professor Debra. Harry kept his face calm, although he was puzzled on the inside. Once Professor Debra had caught their attention, she continued, "I would appreciate it if Mr Polonski there isn't too badly injured. We have quite a lot on our hands after all." She jerked her head to Lionel who was unconscious and Drayvers who was panting in pain.

The crowd sniggered and Polonski exhaled in relief.

"Of course, Professor," Harry replied, turning back to Polonski.

"Together," he repeated to Celeste. He enjoyed making Polonski fear for the curse, the waiting for the unknown curse made the whole duel much more interesting.

"Three, two, one."

Two jets of light left Harry and Celeste's wands and Polonski was immediately banished out of the protective barrier enchantments, blood from his nose. Harry watched as the glow of the light faded and turned to Celeste, a grin on his face, the previous duels forgotten as he surveyed his new opponent.

"I guess this leaves us... again," Celeste laughed softly.

"As usual," Harry agreed. "If Draco were here, it would be like before wouldn't it?"

Celeste held her wand high, poised for the attack. "You wish, Harry. Do you suppose you could let me off easy this time?" she retorted lightly and the light left her wand.

The fight erupted.

Harry smirked as he deflected the spell easily.

Curses flew from their wands. Harry felt a wild sense of freedom as he darted around the platform, weaving in and out of the curses as though each movement was choreographed. For the first time, all the pent up frustration and anger he had was released into the duel. He poured everything he had into it, sending jets of lights at Celeste without stopping, advancing towards her. He rolled, he spun, he jumped. The colourful but deadly jets of light made him exhilarated like no other. Duelling was his drug, his speciality. It made him feel free like he could do anything in the world.

Spells deflected, dodged...

Incantations yelled; split second hesitations were cast away...

This was the type of duel Harry so craved for.

— o — o — o — o — o — o — o —

"Did you see Riddle? Can't believe that Riddle actually won... did you see his duel? I'm sure that I saw the curse was highly illegal!"

"I could practically feel his aura..."

"He cheated...I'm betting you everything I own that Riddle cheated. There's no way a mudblood like him could be so powerful against those Avancés and Travers! Did you see Travers? The way she duelled like a professional... but Riddle was even more powerful! It's impossible!"

Whispers followed Harry everywhere he went after the closure of the tournament. He had won of course, but despite the fact that Celeste came in second behind him, no whispers followed her. Harry would have known since they were walking together. The buzzing of the whispers, pointed stares and glares and curious faces very much irritated him. He wasn't one who loved attention.

No, he preferred staying in the shadows, spying upon people and learning their greatest secret. When the time was perfect, he would lash upon them. Make them underestimate him...which was why his Duelling was purely basic skills, no parselmagic, no wandless magic, no dark magic although it was forbidden.

He could now hear the animated conversation between two Sorciers and try hard to tune it out but it was difficult since they were all in the packed corridor leading to the Dining Hall for lunch.

"Did you see him? When Drayvers cornered him, he didn't even flinch. I would have died there if it were me," the girl said in dramatically. "He just when and literally shoved Drayvers off his feet!" The girl with a long red hair was continued.

Her friend agreed. "And those two people – the Avancés. They're seventh year and supposedly one of the most powerful and Riddle and his friend – is her name Travers? – just wiped them off their feet!"

"Wish I could learn magic like this," the first girl said wistfully.

Her friend snorted. "It takes years and years to train. I thought that the move on Drayvers was more of muggle combat. Wonder where he learned that from... You know, muggles have their own form of duelling with swords and ropes and their own body."

"Really?" the voice was curious now.

The other girl launched into a lengthy explanation of muggle duelling and the conversation steered away from the topic of Harry, for which he was grateful for.

But no such luck. Harry could see the number of people who were staring at him as though seeing him for the first time and he sighed.

"I'll – I need to go somewhere else." He told Celeste and ran for the opposite direction. He could hear Celeste calling him from behind but he ignored her and concentrated on getting away from the crowd.

The destination was already in his mind.

Miles away, Lord Voldemort was infuriatingly bored out of his wits although he maintained his cool, dangerous mask within the presence of his minions, ensuring their silence and terrified glances at him. He was holding his Death Eater meetings and listening to reports made by his incompetent Death Eaters who couldn't get a simple job done! By Merlin, he wondered if these Death Eaters were wizards and he sneered mentally. Even a filthy muggle could probably do a better job than those fools who wore his mark on their left arm, the very same fools that were descended and unworthy of the dark pureblood lineage running through their veins.

A disgrace.

Dimly, he was aware of himself hoping that this Harrison was here in the Manor... but Harry was away at Durmstrang for another ten months of school, again. He always dreaded the day when a new year would start yet he simply couldn't make time go faster.

Wrong, Voldemort corrected himself mentally as he lazily surveyed his Death Eaters. Harrison was away, not at Durmstrang, but to Hogwarts soon, but nevertheless...his Harry would be away for a long, long time.

Voldemort's fingers twitched as he fought to restrain himself from summoning Karkaroff to pull Harry out of Durmstrang and have him home schooled instead.

Merlin save him, he missed Harry. He was missing his son's humour which was directed only at him, Bella and his few close friends. Whenever he had to undergo a particularly foul day of meetings with his Death Eaters, Harry would be around after wards, to calm him down with his humour. Now he had no one to distract him from those followers of his and he was just itching to curse them. With Harry around in the Manor, he usually restrained himself from cursing the Death Eaters for their screams always irritated Harry, no matter the number silencing charms placed.

He raised a hand and the cowering Death Eater before him halted in mid sentence, staring up at him with undisguised fear.

"My L-lord?" the Death Eater stammered fearfully.

Voldemort gave the Death Eater a cool stare as he assessed the figure kneeling before him. The man cringed at his gaze. Voldemort was sure that this man was a Ravenclaw; no Slytherin would ever show their emotions this freely.

"Snape!" he barked out an order as he dismissed the wizard before him. "Up here."

Severus Snape stepped out from his position in the Inner Circle as he slowly walked towards him, his long black robes billowing in the non-existent wind. Voldemort scowled. That move was his trademark.

Snape knelt before him and he surveyed the figure in distaste and motioned for Snape to rise.

"My Lord," Snape said respectfully.

His eyes narrowed unpleasantly. "You know what I want to hear."

Snape did not betray an ounce of fear as he spoke loudly and clearly for all to hear, "My Lord, I have heard from the old fool that the Potter brat has been undergoing training by members of the Order of the Phoenix such as Black, Kingsley and his father. His magical skills remain mediocre but he is arrogant of his skills. He might be one of the stronger fighters at Hogwarts, but he is not powerful enough to match the power of you, My Lord."

Snape paused here and Voldemort considered the information. Interesting...

Snape continued, "I have also received news that later this year, Dumbledore would be conducting private lessons with him."

The members of the Inner Circle looked shocked and Voldemort hissed in disapproval.

"Is that so?" he said coolly.

"Yes my Lord," Snape hurried on. "I have not been able to find out what the lessons are for, but it concerns..." Snape broke off here and hesitated, seemingly to be unwilling to continue and it all the more sparked Voldemort's interest. Snape held a look of reluctance to continue though he hid that part well.

He bored into Snape's eyes, inviting him to continue silently. Cold anger radiated off him. Barely a second passed before Snape rallied himself.

"With all due respect, it concerns your past, my Lord," Snape finished and hoped beyond hope that Voldemort would not kill the messenger.

Severus Snape valued his life.

The Death Eaters looked outraged, but their rage was nothing compared to Voldemort's who barely restrain a snarl of anger.

He hissed in anger, his hatred for Dumbledore burning. What right did the old fool have to show the Potter brat of his past? It was his, and it was not some movie to be displayed to that brat! It was private – his life at the Orphanage, at Hogwarts, it was his not Dumbledore's to show to anyone! How dare the meddling fool! He had no right!

Voldemort looked positively livid as he swore to kill him and Potter, slowly.

A nonverbal Crucio hit Snape right in the chest and he doubled over in pain, trying to contain his screams. Voldemort looked at him in displeasure and increased the intensity of the curse, trying to force

Snape into submission, into screaming... A few seconds later, Snape lost his control and his shrieks of pain echoed within the Manor, sending chills down the spines of Death Eaters who were unfortunate enough to experience Voldemort's Cruciatus Curse before. The fortunate ones could only imagine the intensity of the curse.

Voldemort relished in hearing those screams and was reluctant to stop the curse, but he didn't want his spy to end up insane.

Half a minute later, Voldemort stopped the curse. Snape lay on the floor, gasping for air before the curse hit him again. This time, he held it for a shorter period of time before Snape quickly staggered to his feet once the curse stopped, panting as he did so.

"It is your job to find out what the meddling old fool is teaching Potter," Voldemort said softly. He looked straight into Snape's eyes, boring into him. "You should know the consequences should you fail to do so."

"Y- yes, my Lord," Snape wheezed out, his breath choking as he bent over feeling the after effects of the curse.

A cruel smirk graced Voldemort's lips as he addressed Bellatrix who stepped up before him eagerly. "Bella, I think it's time to invite our guests up?"

Bellatrix gave an insane laughter as she skipped the whole way to the Dungeons. Anticipation was on her face. Several Death Eaters stirred, their attention captured by the next...agenda on the meeting. This was the reason why they joined Voldemort's cause. Voldemort might have regained most of his sanity since the absorption of his Horcruxes but he still favoured the torturing sessions.

For the next hour or two, the tortured screams of prisoners echoed within the room. Voldemort and the Inner Circle took turns torturing them. By the time the muggles were insane and revived after fainting over and over, Voldemort's anger had abated and he pointed his wand at each of them, feeling merciful enough by granting them death. They welcomed death like a release.

'Pathetic,' Voldemort sneered in his mind. Muggles always sought death as a release, but not him, Voldemort. He was immortal as was

Harry. They would never seek death under torture like these weak minded muggles.

Voldemort smirked as he dismissed the Death Eaters. A little torture always worked wonders on him. He wondered vaguely what his son was doing now, at Durmstrang.

A loud and long drawn sigh broke the serene silence in the late afternoon. Twilight was approaching.

A lone hooded figure was lying in the middle of a huge grass patch; only that the grass was covered in mountains of fresh, white snow. The place was secluded, only the few who stumbled across it knew of its existence, and it served its purpose this way – where one could be all alone, undisturbed by the troubles of human nature and enjoy the silence while it lasted.

Harry lay on his back under a huge shadowing tree, as he stared up at the partially obscured sky. He was in no mood to be surrounded by his curious and slightly awestruck schoolmates after winning the Duelling Tournament Interschool. He was deeply troubled, and he wanted to be alone. How he wished that he could have his father to talk to, but here he was alone, sitting in the snow. A confidant – that was what he desperately wanted. He had friends of course, friends that most people could only dream of having. Yet he wanted someone that wouldn't judge him no matter how slightly, and someone that wasn't troubled by the petty concerns of a human nature.

A sudden slithering caught his attention as he immediately sat up right, his wand snapped in his hands as his eyes darted around warily. For a moment, he was puzzled as he could see nothing which would disrupt the peaceful silence. The trees were swaying in time with the breeze, the snow was falling gently to the ground and the clouds in the sky looked the same as ever, drifting slowly towards the South.

Then a highly irritated hiss broke the silence.

/Stupid human... that is my spot you idiot boy... Why this spot of all places you humans can have.../ a snake hissed angrily.

Harry tilted his head to the direction of the soft voice, almost melodic though it contrasted with its angry tone.

/Hello/ Harry hissed politely to the small figure in front of him. /Would you like to join me? /

A thin and slender snake was slithering along the snow towards him. She was a pleasant dark green colour, her scales almost glowing in the midst of the snow. She swayed as she slithered from side to side, her body curling up every now and then in the cold snow.

The snake gave him a look which he assumed was anger.

/Join you? / the snake huffed furiously. /That was my space before you came. Would you like to join me, you mean? Humans and their pride, stealing my seat and remaining so high and mighty./

/Well, pardon me. / Harry drawled.

/Pardon you? Pardon you? Why, how could you be so arrogant even as a human? Pardon you? Of course not – but wait – you... you speak! / The snake stopped in mid-rant and turned her gaze towards him, the anger in them dissolving into shock.

/I believe I do. / Harry retorted pleasantly, his words layered with sarcasm.

Surprise was evident in the voice. /Impossible./ she declared haughtily.

Harry only smiled as he stretched a hand out to the snake. He recognised what breed she was. She was poisonous, but it wasn't lethal enough to kill him. From his past experiences, he knew that snakes would not attack a parselmouth. The snake eyed him warily and finally slithered up his outstretched hand and curled herself around the crook of his elbow, hissing in pleasure at the warmth his body gave her.

Harry was surprised to learn that he didn't feel an aversion to the physical contact like he usually did.

/Aren't you scared that I will bite you? / The snake asked curiously.
/I'm lethal you know, very lethal. / The snake said importantly and slightly threateningly.

Harry chuckled. /You are lethal but not enough to kill me. And you won't harm another speaker. / He retorted. /And if you wanted to attack, you would have done so. /

The snake glared at him, her bluff being called off.

/What's your name then, young one?/ Harry asked at the beautiful snake before him leisurely.

The snake gave him an affronted glare and took her time to position herself comfortably before deciding to reply.

/We do not have names, snake speaker. / she said loftily.

Harry considered the statement for a minute. /Would you like a name then? /

The snake fixed him with an unwavering stare. /We do not have names, snake speaker. Names are for humans like you. /

/Then how do I address you?/ Harry countered.

The snake fell silent for a moment. /Fair point. / she conceded.
/Alright then, but don't give me a silly name like Twinkles and Stripe. I'm a snake, not a cute little puppy. / The snake scowled as she tightened her hold on his hands threateningly. /I like your warmth... you are not like the rest of the wizards who scream and run at the sight of me. I don't bite you humans unless you anger me.../ If the snake could sneer, she certainly would.

Harry smiled at the snake at his arms, marvelling at her temper as he thought of suitable names for her. He stared at the deep blue sky, which was tinted with the faintest trace of midnight blue as twilight settled in. The sky was so everlasting; the universe had no boundaries, how he would love that sort of life, freedom from everything, like a bird, wings outstretched, and soaring across the oceans... And inspiration for the young snake's name came swiftly.

/Licentia? / He said simply. The snake uncurled herself from his arm and stared at him with those intelligent eyes. /It means freedom. / He explained.

/I like that name. / Licentia agreed in her melodic voice. /Thank you, snake speaker./ She curled herself back at his arms. /Don't move. / she ordered him.

Harry laughed loudly, freely at her temper when he shifted himself ever so slightly.

/My name isn't snake speaker. It's Harry. /

/Whatever, snake speaker. / Did Licentia just rolled her eyes?

/Your temper amazes me. /

/I know it does. /

Harry chuckled at the snake before him. It seemed like Licentia had a temper of her own... quite a spitfire but she was good company.

The two did not converse for a long while and Harry lay back on the snow covered grass, immersed in his thoughts. Minutes ticked by and Licentia slowly stirred. When she did, her question came out of the blue and it startled him for a moment.

/Is something bothering you then Harry? I can sense your emotions, your fear and your excitement. Your emotions are practically screaming out to me. /

Harry sighed.

/Perhaps you can tell me what's troubling you? /

Harry stared into the eyes of Licentia. She stared back, unblinking, daring him silently. He broke the eye contact, slightly uncomfortable under the unwavering, persistent gaze.

/It's complicated. / He hedged out, unwilling to delve further into the topic.

Licentia persisted. /I'm sure I can keep up with your fickle human feelings. / She insisted strongly, sounding highly disapproving. /You humans have so many emotions. / She grumbled sullenly.

Harry laughed at Licentia.

He did not know how it happened; all he knew was that he relented and everything bothering him came spilling out of him. He poured all his troubles out to Licentia, his frustrations while Licentia nodded and hissed softly in agreement.

At last, he stopped; his breath slightly quick in his long speech. Almost an hour had passed in his long rant. It felt like such a short while, yet he couldn't deny that it felt good to talk about it all to someone who could listen and not make judgements on everything he did.

/So that's it/ he hissed after he finished with his colourful story of his life.

If snakes could smile, Licentia certainly would. She was young, just a month old, yet she seemed so matured. /Anytime./ she said simply.

Harry looked at the night sky. The sky was pitch black now, the faint outline of the twinkling stars could be seen in a distance, smiling down at him. Dinner was approaching and he needed to get back to Durmstrang before his absence was noticed.

/I have to go back now/ he told Licentia reluctantly as he stood gracefully to his feet. Licentia made no move to leave but remained curled at his arms, silently watching him with reproachful eyes. Then a thought struck him.

/Would you like to follow me back?/

He didn't want to anger the young snake after all and it seemed as though Licentia was not keen at all to leave him. Snakes were just like Slytherins, proud and full of pride.

Licentia hissed quickly in response /Of course I would, Harry. I was wondering when you would ask... Were you planning to leave me here in the snow alone?/ she demanded, her tone angry now. Harry was aware of her body curling itself tightly to his arm possessively.

/No/ he assured Licentia and was surprised to hear that the answer was genuine. /You were a comfort to me in the past hour and you listened to me. Most snakes wouldn't and most people don't understand./

/I told you I could keep up. / Licentia reminded him smugly.

Harry rolled his eyes at the young snake. /I ever told you that you are very egoistic? /

/You might have mentioned it once. / Licentia said casually, unaffected by the comment.

/I'm sure I did. /

Harry vaguely wondered why he was arguing with a snake. But Licentia was good company.

They were approaching the main gates of Durmstrang now. The loud buzz of chatter could be heard again, signalling Harry's irritation and annoyance. The chatter also reminded him of the students within the protected walls of the castle.

/I would have to disillusion you for a while, do you mind? Most of my classmates would not take kindly to seeing you. They are terrified of you,/ Harry scoffed and Licentia looked at him in amusement. /I do not want you to be injured because of me./

Licentia inclined her head slightly.

/Anything for you, Harry. We're friends, are we not?/ she hissed back, her tone taking a possessive edge.

/Friends.../ Harry's voice trailed off then he smiled down at the snake. /I like that. /

Licentia snuggled back into the crook of his arm. Within minutes, she was asleep and Harry vaguely wondered how he would introduce his new found friend to Celeste and Draco. Celeste wouldn't mind and would be ecstatic and mildly envious of his parselmouth abilities – why did every pureblood envy him for it? – but Draco... he could just imagine the terror on the blonds' face

even before the actual introduction happened and the envy that would soon follow.

/Friends. / Licentia agreed as her body faded from view under the charm.

Author's Notes

Merry Christmas everyone!

Thanks to all who reviewed which house you wanted Harry to go, I really appreciate it and it helped me to sort out some thoughts and stuff.

Next Chapter - Hogwarts, finally! & Reviews work wonders on me ;) *hint*

11. Sorting Hat versus Riddle

A loud, annoying shrill voice broke the peaceful morning silence like a knife cutting through butter effortlessly. I turned, irritated to Pansy Parkinson as she latched herself onto my right arm while we swaggered through the doors of the Great Hall and to the Slytherin table.

What a perfect way to start a perfect day – with blue skies and an unobstructed sun – I groaned internally. I shrugged her off my arm in irritation and turned back to the toast I was eating, ignoring her. She didn't take the hint though, and continued going on and on about the latest Hogwarts gossip happily and when she was done, she moved onto another topic.

I swear – I can feel a headache coming.

Pansy seemed to have a gift to annoy the hell out of me – though it wasn't just me, it was basically the entire Hogwarts population, minus her small gang of giggling Witch Weekly obsessed female Slytherins.

Pansy was just being... Pansy.

"It's amazing, Draco. Today, Durmstrang would be coming to Hogwarts, for a year! I wonder who is it they're bringing this time... too bad Krum graduated, he was a fun to be with, remember?" Pansy gushed on, her eyes lighting up at the farewell party the Slytherins threw for the Durmstrang students. I gave her a curt nod and turned to Blaise instead, ignoring her blabbering.

"When are the students going to arrive?" I asked, as though it was a throwaway question, yet inside, my heart was feeling excited.

Celeste and Harrison would most probably be coming to Hogwarts. My life was saved, literally. I was actually looking forward to see Celeste Travers – can anyone imagine? Although, it made sense in a way. With her here, there would be someone to talk to when Harry was in one of his silent, angry moods again. I couldn't blame him for that but it was terrifying to be with him when he was angry – he would be like the junior version of the Dark Lord and he was certainly as powerful. Well at least Celeste has a great sense of

humour when she wasn't ignoring me, though I would never admit it to her. She was smug enough as she is.

"Weren't you listening, Draco?" Blaise said. I glared at him. "They would be arriving soon. In half an hour's time I suppose."

"Ahh," I said.

Then I saw the Chosen One enter the Great Hall with an arrogantly smug expression on his face. Heads turned towards the Chosen One and he flashed a smirk at the crowd. Several girls squealed and Potter pretended to look airy. The Chosen One and the whole load of rubbish and Potter wasn't worth half of the Dark Lord or Harry for that matter. Potter was talking to the Mudblood and Weasel was tagging behind them, trying to cut into their conversation but they ignored him. As usual. I sneered at them. Weasel looked pathetic with his red hair flopping around and I saw that he had grown over the summer as usual, looking overgrown in his second hand robes.

Granger caught my eye and she turned towards me, suspiciously. Her eyes narrowed at the sight of me. I gave her my trademark smirk before turning away. Just you wait, I thought bitterly, my mood ruined at the sight of the infamous know-it-all who seemed to deem it as her life priority to act as a walking encyclopaedia. But they wouldn't be Dumbledore's favourites anymore. Actually, Dumbledore wouldn't get a chance to play favourites for much longer. Once Harry arrives... Dumbledore would be history. The thought cheered me up fractionally but then I remembered that it was my mission to complete. I wanted to bang my head against the table in frustration.

That vanishing cabinet was utterly broken.

And they say that I'm getting a little too paranoid.

"Are you taking part in the Duelling Tournament then, Draco?" Theodore Nott asked curiously, from across the table. Theodore was a skilled duellist and he would probably be taking part in the tournament. It would be cool to see their faces when they duelled with Harry. No one ever beat Harry in a duel since a long time ago – not Aunt Bella, my father or Celeste. Only perhaps the Dark Lord himself, seeing that he was trained by the Dark Lord.

I took my time to answer. "Yeah," I said in an off-hand voice. "I wouldn't bank on a win though. Durmstrang would be getting the cup this year."

Now all eyes were on me. "How do you know?" Crabbe demanded, his small eyes squinting gormlessly.

Oops. I said too much. Harry would kill me for my slip up even if it wasn't of major importance. I grimaced internally but plastered a convincing smirk on my face.

"Do you know something that we don't?" Theodore asked suspiciously, his eyebrows raising at me. "Wouldn't be the first time," he muttered to himself.

"Just a gut feeling," I replied. They turned back to their conversation though the unconvinced expressions lingered on their faces. Well, they would know soon enough.

The minutes passed in small talk. Pansy was gushing away to Daphne who looked bored and was barely listening and was staring off into space, her little finger twirling the ends of her blond hair. Crabbe and Goyle were stuffing more pastries into their mouths. I sneered at them. Honestly, don't those two trolls ever stop eating? Probably not, I conceded. Opposite me, Blaise and Theodore started talking about politics and about some French Minister and his overly haughty advisor... I didn't join in; I already heard that bit of news. Apparently the French Minister's advisor wasn't too keen on supporting the Dark Lord in the war. Well, they would have to eventually if the Dark Lord came knocking on their doors with the Dark Mark over their house.

At last, it was mercifully time for the Durmstrang ship to reach Hogwarts. I stood and stretched, eager to meet Harry and Celeste. The others looked up at me in confusion, their conversations coming to a halt.

"Well?" I drawled. "Aren't you going to welcome the students from Durmstrang? Or Crabbe and Goyle, are you going to stay here to continue eating?" I stared disgustedly at the large forms of my sidekicks.

They stared at me as though I sprouted wings all of a sudden. Then Blaise broke the silence, looking bewildered, his eyebrows contracted in puzzlement. "Draco? Did we hear you correctly? You're actually going to grace them of your presence?"

I refrained from rolling myself and maintained my composure. "Yes," I emphasized slowly. "We would be gathering in the Great Hall for the welcoming talk, but I am curious to see the Durmstrang ship. It is rumoured to be... fascinating." I grimaced inwardly for a lack of better word.

Blaise seemed convinced by my argument and immediately followed me out of the Great Hall. The others immediately followed, tagging behind me as I led the group out of the hall. Potter and his sidekicks were leaving too, surrounded by their group of Gryffindors and he was talking animatedly with them, a grin on his face. I didn't have to be there to know what they were talking about. Durmstrang and its students and of course, the tournament. We were all old enough to participate in the tournament this time round, for which I was thankful of. It hadn't been nice, sitting at the side to watch Cedric Diggory – the Hufflepuff of all people! – compete against Viktor Krum.

Potter and I stared each other down as we stood at the entrance of the door which unfortunately, wasn't wide enough to allow the both of us and our house members through.

I blamed the four founders for not anticipating that the Gryffindors and Slytherins would never get along well enough with each other and be polite enough to let the other house through. They should have just built a bigger door.

Problem solved.

Potter scowled. "Shove off Malfoy, we got here first." He attempted to push his way out of the door while his group of Gryffindors tagged behind him eagerly.

No way would I let Potter go first. We Malfoys always deserve the priority and the best.

"Looks like you learned some backbone, Potty. Whatever they are calling you these days, the Chosen One, the One-Who-Defeats-The-Dark-Lord," I sneered. "When you haven't done anything yet."

Pansy laughed shrilly and I wanted to silence her irritating laughter. This was the witch that my father wanted me to sign a marriage contract with?

I watched in satisfaction as Potter turned a bright tomato red. Granger stepped forward, ready to argue while Weasel raised his wand in what he thought was a threatening manner, preparing to curse me.

"I'll get you for that one, Malfoy!" Weasel snarled, taking a step forward.

I prepared to dodge out of the way when I saw Professor Snape coming our way. I changed course and remained rooted in spot, a smirk on my face. Weasel shot a hex at me as Professor Snape cast a reflection charm, causing the hex to rebound on Weasel. Unfortunately for him, he didn't dodge in time. I sneered at him as bright orange warts appeared on his face.

Potter glared at me before turning to Weasel. The rest of the Slytherins laughed, myself along with them. I gave Professor Snape a grateful glance and he nodded curtly.

"Ten points for attempting to jinx a fellow school mate, Mr Weasley," Professor Snape said silkily. Potter and Weasel looked outraged and Potter was about to argue – as usual – when Granger grabbed his arm. Potter shook her off angrily, his eyes burning into mine in sheer hatred. If looks could kill... well, let's not get to that part.

"Wise move, Mudblood," I said haughtily. Potter and Weasel glared at me while Granger ignored me with another glance at Potter. I turned and stalked out of the Great Hall, towards the crowd of students by the lake, waiting to welcome the Durmstrang students. They were talking amongst themselves loudly, clearly excited about the event.

I shoved against the students there who immediately cleared off to make way for me. Of course, Malfoys deserved the best always. Without trouble, I made my way to the front of the crowd, with the

rest of the Slytherins. The younger students were squealing and I wanted to hex them. Couldn't they ever be quiet? Such acts – like disgusting muggles shrieking. Among the students, I saw Professor McGonagall and Professor Snape who were waiting to welcome the students into the Great Hall.

"Reckon how many people are there?" Blaise said to no one in particular.

"Ten I suppose," Theodore replied. I arched my brow elegantly and he explained, "The first round of the duel will be equal – ten from them and ten from us. So, the students coming for the exchange would be ten and all ten would be in the Duel immediately."

"How do they sort the students to come?" Crabbe asked mulishly.

I wanted to hit his head sometimes. But that was a muggle move so I refrained from it. It didn't stop me from giving him a dim-witted glare though. "Through their grades or duel," Theodore explained patiently. Always the good guy to explain. I snorted before controlling myself when the rest of them turned to look at me.

What was wrong with me today? I was acting out of my usual character. If father ever saw how I behaved today, without fail I would be sitting through more of the – boring – etiquette classes I took since I was three. Bloody three years old and learning the basic pureblood etiquette. Well, I consoled myself. Better than making a fool of myself like Weasel, whose face finally regained its normal freckles instead of warts. If I didn't know better, I would have thought him as a mudblood.

A sudden change in the calm waves of the lake caught my attention. Pansy squealed and the teachers immediately starting shepherding us to make space for our visitors. We backed about fifteen feet from the lake and watched in awe as the stern of the ship rose majestically. I clamped my mouth shut, not wanting to stare at it open-mouthed, though I had to admit the ship was wicked.

It was huge, looking like a cruise ship. I knew from a glance that it probably had many entertainment rooms and a snack shop. Why couldn't I have gone to Durmstrang? All we had on the Hogwarts Express was a candy cart. That's all. But...the top of the ship was

glass and ... I squinted for a second, not believing my eyes, but how could it possibly be a –

"Quidditch Pitch? Bloody – I mean amazing!" Blaise exclaimed, correcting himself for the slip. His wide eyes were on the Quidditch Pitch as well.

Excited murmurs rose from the crowd around us, the students were pushing and craning their necks for a better view of the ship. Even as we watched, the ship stopped and swayed slightly in the waves. Then the students from Durmstrang began to exit from the main platform. From where we stood, it was too far to make out anything, but I saw the robes of the students were brown, save for the two figures in jet black robes standing proud and tall at the head of the students.

In the lead were Professor Karkaroff and another Professor with light golden hair and bright blue eyes that I didn't recognize. She looked young for a professor, I noted. The students followed behind her in an orderly manner, not speaking, but their heads held high proudly and in a grace that the majority of Hogwarts students would never achieve. They gracefully made their ways onto the grounds and made their way towards us, though they were still by the shore of the lake. The murmurings grew louder and I sent a death glare at the crowd who immediately ceased their annoying chatters.

And then it hit me – a wave of power, coming from nowhere, ensnaring my senses, drowning out my thoughts before I collected my thoughts and reeled myself back to space. Even so, the familiar wave of power made me breathless in awe which I tried not to show on my face. Shocked gasps rang around the grounds and my eyes were immediately drawn to the taller figure in black standing right behind the Professors who was clearly the one radiating the intoxicating power. Fifteen feet away, it was hard to tell who it was, but whoever he was, he was clearly powerful with such an aura that even people like me without the gift could feel it. The powerful figure had his hood covering his face and his head was slightly bowed down. It appeared as though he was having a quiet conversation with his partner in black.

And then he tilted his head up, staring right at me.

The intense emerald green of his eyes were the first thing I saw, followed by the familiarity which I could barely make out because of the cloak. There was a second of a pause while my mind ran in overdrive.

A second ticked by.

"Harrison?" I whispered in disbelief.

His partner looked up a second later and my eyes widened in shock. My breath hitched and I froze.

The figure smiled mysteriously.

Harry was feeling irritated. There he was – sitting in one of the vast meeting rooms the ship held. Celeste and Lea sat on either side of him, both of them staring impatiently at Headmaster Karkaroff who was giving another lengthy speech. The previous topic had gone on for an hour and a half. Harry had learned nothing, except that misbehaviour would not be tolerated. He suppressed the urge to glare at Karkaroff and instead, settled on thinking about Hogwarts.

"And hence, I would be highly displeased if any of you were to embarrass Durmstrang in any form or way during your stay there," Karkaroff finished, giving his goatee a twirl.

"Headmaster, I assure you that I will never do that," Drayvers said smoothly. Harry turned to him in bemusement. "The same can't be said for some people though," Drayvers continued, his eyes flickering to Harry. He ignored Drayvers.

"Excellent, excellent, Mr Drayvers," Karkaroff said. Harry thought he heard Celeste's sigh of exasperation next to him. "And this brings our discussion to an end," Karkaroff said, rising from his chair to stretch before he settled back into it.

Finally, Harry thought wryly, the speech was over. The students stood fluidly from their chairs which scraped along the marble floor before they exited the room far too eagerly. Harry, Celeste and Lea followed when they heard Professor Debra call them.

"Mr Riddle, Miss Travers?" Professor Debra called. They turned. "Would you stay for a moment please?"

Harry nodded to Lea to go first and she exited the room, closing the door softly as she went. He and Celeste made their way back to their seats around the meeting table where Karkaroff sat at the head of it and Professor Debra to his right.

"As the Head Boy and Girl, there are several things that you may need to take note of. Here are some last minute changes which would be prudent for you to know," Professor Debra began and he nodded. "During your absence at Durmstrang, a temporary Head has been selected to keep the students in track, I'm sure you know? However, at Hogwarts, we have to bear in mind that it is not our school and it is also your safety as the Head students to take responsibility of the student's safety in Durmstrang, or at least keep them out of trouble."

"I understand, Professor," Celeste said. "Is there anything else you wished to say, Professor?"

Professor Debra nodded but Karkaroff interrupted. "The schedules have been changed due to unforeseen circumstances. The classes that you have chosen and which Hogwarts offers will be taught by Hogwarts professors, which you do know. The other subjects will be conducted by our teachers, but due to the sorting, we might not find a suitable time table for everyone. This is why the classes conducted by our private teachers might be split into two or three different time slots to fit your schedules."

"Sorting, Professor?" Harry said sharply.

Karkaroff settled back into his comfortable chair and Professor Debra turned to him and explained, "Yes, sorting. You will be sorted into houses at Hogwarts. I'm sure you know what houses there are? Unfortunately, you will have to be split up should you be in different houses."

Harry's mind reeled, fast forwarding to several issues. What house would he want to go? But that matter could be settled later. "We were not informed there would be such a change," he said with a frown.

Karkaroff scowled. "The change was a last minute decision, finalised only yesterday by Dumbledore. He thinks that as an exchange

programme, the students shouldn't be allowed to mingle among their own school and by sorting them, we would promote interaction between the schools and international magical co-operation."

Harry scoffed inwardly. What was this about interaction between the schools? More probably, Dumbledore wanted to keep the Durmstrang students from sticking together and ganging up on the students of Hogwarts as a school. He wanted, basically, to split them up into small groups of twos and threes. There were only ten students here and ... it would be easy for him to control them if they were divided among themselves. Harry felt his temper boil. He would not let Dumbledore control him. Then a thought struck him and he felt his blood run cold. Could Dumbledore want to rope some of the Durmstrang students into the Order of the Phoenix?

Durmstrang was a school which people viewed Dark. While dark did not mean bad, this would be a chance for Dumbledore to strike and pull students from Durmstrang to join him as he fought Voldemort. The students... tackling them in separate houses would be easier and if they were in Gryffindor and Hufflepuff, the influence from their housemates would make the job far easier. What more, the students coming to Hogwarts would be the most selective and gifted few... Perfect for Dumbledore to start his courting of students to join his precious Order and Durmstrang students did have a wider knowledge of magic compared to Hogwarts.

Manipulative old man, Harry growled mentally. He would be damned if he let Dumbledore do what he planned to; no, he would make use of the stay at Hogwarts to seek out allies to join his father.

Harry nodded stiffly and Karkaroff rose with a barking laugh and exited the room. Harry and Celeste followed right after him, but they were halted once more by Professor Debra.

"And Mr Riddle? Do try your best and I would appreciate it if you let some of the extent of your abilities to be shown at Hogwarts," Professor Debra paused and Harry's eyes narrowed in suspicion. What did the Professor know? "Your aura for one," Professor Debra continued.

Harry spun around abruptly, to come face to face with the small smile on Professor Debra's face. He felt himself go stiff in shock. How had the Professor known? But...nevertheless...He nodded. It

might be useful to allow a certain extent of his abilities to be made known if he wanted to convince students to join his father. He needed to show them the power the Dark side had.

"You may go," Professor Debra smiled after a second.

They left the room.

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This is it, Harry told himself as he levitated his carriages to the platform of the ship. The students stood behind him, waiting for the Professors to give the cue and leave the ship for Hogwarts. They were all excited since none of them had been qualified for the Triwizard tournament and this would be the first time they went to Hogwarts.

"Remember. You will do Durmstrang proud," Karkaroff said commandingly. The students nodded stiffly, standing straight, their faces proud with the glory of their school. Harry discreetly lifted his hood up. Karkaroff's eyes flickered to him, suspicions in them before he turned back and led the students out of the room.

Harry engaged Celeste in a conversation about the mission quietly as they followed Karkaroff. She responded quietly, voicing her concerns. They stepped on the grounds and the sudden change of environment made him aware of where he was once more. He remembered Professor Debra's words and with a slight smirk, unleashed a fraction of his repressed aura. The reaction was immediate – he could hear the shocked gasp from the Hogwarts students gathering to greet them. His schoolmates looked wary but controlled their emotions better, though it did not stop them from glancing at him suspiciously.

Harry didn't look up to the crowd of students welcoming them for he didn't think Draco would be waiting for them here. The Malfoy Heir would probably be inside the Great Hall waiting for the exchange students.

"Enjoyed that?" Celeste whispered softly. He caught her deep blue eyes which were laughing silently and her lips that were fighting back a smile at the reactions of the students. She lifted her hood as they stepped into the cold wind billowing around them.

He flashed a smirk. "Deeply."

He turned away from Celeste and raised his head. For a moment, all he saw was the sea of students not fifteen feet away from him then his eyes seemed to be drawn to a particular blond at the front of the crowd.

His eyes widened slightly, not expecting to see his friend standing in the crowd, flanked by the students in Slytherin colours, all of whom stood behind him.

"Harrison?" Harry heard the disbelief whisper, barely audible.

Celeste heard the whispered name and looked at the grey eyes which widened in mild surprise. Then a warm smile formed across her face as she grasped the hem of her hood and pulled it down, revealing her dark brown hair and pale aristocratic face. Recognition flashed past Draco's face in slight confusion.

Harry smiled and he gracefully glided forward to his friend in the midst of the crowd, turning away from the Headmaster and Professor Debra, both of whom stopped and turned towards him in curiosity. The students stopped as well, but Celeste followed behind him, their cloaks rustling on the grounds. Their movements seemed to jerk the Slytherin out of his reverie and he rushed forward towards them eagerly, meeting them halfway in the distance.

They stopped in front of each other and Harry noticed that all eyes were upon them. The Hogwarts students were watching, their mouths open in shock wondering what this powerful, alluring figure was doing with Malfoy who abandoned his pureblood grace and actually ran forward to greet the two students.

Harry raised his hand and lightly tugged the tip of his hood and lowered it, revealing his face. Draco's eyes widened and his lips formed a smile.

"Draco," Harry acknowledged.

"Harry?" Draco breathed. "Harry! But you – but the power... your aura?" he whispered, his voice dropping.

The students were listening intently now. Harry ignored them.

"I figured that it would be prudent if I established a form of a base," he said slowly and Draco nodded in understanding as he grabbed Harry's arm.

"Well, come on then, you've got to meet my friends – the Slytherins," Draco said excitedly as he began to drag Harry over to the crowd of Slytherins who were watching him intently.

"Nice to meet you," Celeste smirked, interrupting them as she folded her arms and looked at the pair of them from the side. Draco stopped in mid track and turned to Celeste before jumping backwards in horror. "Celeste Travers!" Draco yelled and his voice echoed in the grounds.

"I believe that's me," Celeste said with a wry smile, unfolding her arms and walking forward haughtily. "I hope you haven't forgotten me."

Draco scowled at Celeste who laughed lightly. "You need to stop jumping up on me. You nearly gave me a heart attack!" Draco protested loudly.

"You seemed on the verge of forgetting my presence."

Draco scowled. "So you're at Hogwarts then? Finally – I've been waiting for ages." His voice rose dramatically.

"It's only been about two weeks," Celeste reminded.

"It felt like two years," Draco argued, earning an amused expression from Celeste.

Harry smiled just as rapid footsteps caught his attention. He tilted his head to see the rest of the Slytherin gang walking quickly towards them, and a pug-faced girl in the lead.

"Celestine Travers?" said the pug-faced girl. "It's really you? The Celestine Travers who offended the son of the Swedi—"

Celeste turned towards the girl with a barely hidden look of boredom as she acknowledged her identity. "Parkinson, if I'm not wrong?" she

interrupted, preventing Pansy from continuing. "Pleasure meeting you here again."

"You disappeared from the Ball over the summer without much of a warning after you dunked the whole stock of Firewhisky onto that Swedish Minister's son!" Pansy exclaimed, her voice rising shrilly. "You could have told me that you left. I spent the entire time looking for you and the unfortunate victim was tearing the ball down by searching for you."

"It was an accident," Celeste replied haughtily without a bother and Pansy snorted in disbelief. Harry chuckled. The sight of Celeste flaring up on the unfortunate victim must have been a sight to see. "Nevertheless, if you may excuse us – Harrison and I need to leave with our schoolmates." She gestured to the rest of the students watching the exchange.

Harry nodded and all eyes turned towards him. He gave a curt nod at them before he turned towards Karkaroff and Professor Debra who were introduced to another two Hogwarts Professors. Judging by Draco's description, they were the Heads of Gryffindor and Slytherin. He recognized the stern expression on the witches' face and the calculating look on the wizards'. That would be Severus Snape, he deduced. One of the members of the Inner Circle and a spy for his father. He wasn't so sure of the spy part and where his loyalties lay but he would make use of this visit to Hogwarts to keep an eye on him.

At least he would be doing something useful rather than linger in the company of Draco's friends. He hadn't missed the guarded expression that the Slytherin group had regarded him with – especially the son of Nott. He would have to remedy that later.

He watched closely as the two Hogwarts Professors ushered the students into the Great Hall where they would wait and welcome the guests. He had to admit though, that Hogwarts was indeed impressive. He entered the Great Hall to find that its size was comparable to Durmstrang's Dining Hall, but it had four different tables and the large banners of the four houses hanging over each table.

He glanced around the Great Hall and saw Draco sitting in the midst of the Slytherins. Draco waved to him and he nodded in

acknowledgement. And then his eyes were drawn to the Gryffindor table.

He thought he felt his insides freeze up as he stared at a lone figure; it was as though time stopped and everything went silent, his world was spinning. He recognised every bit of the person – the black hair and hazel eyes, the arrogant smug smile and the proud demeanour. He swallowed and kept his eyes blank and unreadable while he boiled with hatred in the inside. The boy was laughing as he talked to his friend – a red head. Jealousy fuelled him and consumed him before he steeled himself and reminded himself that he had nothing to be jealous of. He had the best family in the world; he had his Aunt Bella, his father and his friends.

Said boy turned towards him as though he caught him staring. Their eyes locked with each others for a split second and Harry saw his brother's eyes narrow in distaste and boredom, before Harry turned away, abruptly, shaking in anger. But he couldn't miss the happiness within those hazel brown eyes before it caught sight of him and it angered him to no extent. So his brother was having a happy life after his taunting towards his younger brother years ago? He was probably basking in his life as the only heir to the Potter family and the attention showered on the Chosen One.

Harry gritted his teeth and clenched his fist, trying not to let his anger show though the monster within him roared with anger. He was shaking and he was aware of the haphazard way his aura was flaring around him. He closed his eyes shut for a moment and forced himself to think and calm down. With a sigh, he felt his aura dim and roll around in more peaceful ways and prayed with all his heart that no one especially Dumbledore realised of his sudden abrupt change in emotions.

They were now assembled in the front of the Great Hall, just before the Teacher's table. Desperate for something else to look at and think of, he quickly tilted his head towards the teacher's table.

There was nothing to prepare him for it. It came just as suddenly as his shock of looking at his brother – like a hurricane, without warning. He lifted his head only to catch a pair of familiar emerald green eyes. He thought that a shocked gasp might escape him, yet he found himself in time and controlled his reactions. The thick dark red hair, almond shaped green eyes...

His mother. He was seeing his mother for the first time in ten years.

He breathing paused and his lips parted slightly in shock as he stared into those eyes, his heart filled with emotion – anger, sadness, happiness, disappointment, excitement, trepidation... And he felt an empty thunk across his heart as those eyes turned away from him, disinterested, and drifted towards the direction of the Gryffindor table. Harry's eyes remained at his mother as he followed her gaze which led him back to Joshua. Some part of him had foolishly hoped that his mother would recognise him but it didn't matter to him anymore. He knew of course, that his mother was the Charms Professor of Hogwarts but the sudden realisation and shock of seeing Lily Potter unravelled his painfully pieced mask. The hurt and shock that flitted cross his face for the tiniest of a second was enough for anyone to notice.

And with another jolt of shock, he caught sight of another two people he never expected to see so soon. His father and his godfather – James Potter and Sirius Black, both sitting beside his mother, oblivious that their runaway son was currently within ten metres of them.

They too, were laughing and talking happily and he watched as his mother, no, Professor Potter berate them, just like it was in the old days. He vaguely wondered why they were here since James Potter and Sirius Black were famous aurors within the Ministry. Then he remembered that they were helping the Chosen One to train and prepare himself.

To train and protect the Chosen One, he sneered mentally. No amount of training could ever bring his brother on par with his father. The Light were wasting their time and Dumbledore was the biggest fool.

Harry tore his eyes from them and watched intently as Dumbledore rose from his seat and the chatters within the Great Hall ceased immediately. The grandfatherly look was in place and his blue eyes twinkled madly as he surveyed the students from Durmstrang with a satisfied glance like a hunter observing its prey. Harry immediately tightened his Occulmency shields and broke his eye contact with Dumbledore when he felt a light pressure in his mind.

He snarled mentally, the monster in him roaring in anger.

His eyes became hard and cold as he stared straight ahead, refusing to look at Dumbledore and he fought to push Dumbledore out of his head. It was easier with the gift he inherited from his father – he had natural Occulmency shields.

Inside, he was fuming. How dare Dumbledore attempt Legimency on him when he hadn't done anything – yet. Granted, the full extent of his aura could be felt by Dumbledore even if he repressed part of it – just his luck that Dumbledore could sense auras – but still, the old fool didn't need to do that, before he had even done anything. For all Dumbledore knew, he be siding with the Light or neutral in the war. Damn Dumbledore and his assumptions.

But the meddling coot was right in a way. Harry did come to Hogwarts with a mission – to kill him. Harry did have connections with the Dark side – he was the Dark Lord's only son and heir. And Dumbledore did have to be wary of Harry – he was here to avenge himself from Dumbledore. He wanted to hear the Prophecy for real, to see what made Dumbledore decide that his brother was the Chosen One and why he was a lesser being compared to his brother. And most importantly, he hated Dumbledore with a passion – the cruel, manipulating words Dumbledore said in the interview with the prophet.

Yes, he admitted with an overwhelming sense of righteousness. Dumbledore needed to know Harry and be wary of him.

He couldn't repress a smirk. The Order was in the dark, wondering what the Malfoy Heir was up to, and in time, trying to guess what he and Celeste were snooping around the school for, right under their noses.

He wanted to see the light leave Dumbledore's eyes and his brother's. If the Prophecy was indeed true, then his brother would have to die and he realised that he didn't feel very repulse by the idea. Blood might be thicker than water, but Voldemort had blood adopted him. That statement was overruled and it did not fit. Only under his father's new rule would the Wizarding World improve for the better rather than remain in the corrupted way it is now especially with the fool Cornelius Fudge as the Minister.

Finally, Dumbledore turned away from him and towards the school and the Chosen One. Harry smiled grimly at throwing off Dumbledore. Casting a look towards the Headmaster, he saw a rather annoyed look flash across Dumbledore's blue eyes but it was quickly hidden by the large, phoney smile which he flashed to his brother. His brother grinned foolishly in return, his eyes lighting up at the sight of the Headmaster's acknowledgement.

Fools, Harry thought savagely.

"Welcome, welcome, students of Durmstrang!" Dumbledore said merrily. "It gives me great pleasure to welcome you once again to Hogwarts!" Dumbledore shouted the last word and cheers erupted from the students, especially those in the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff table. The Slytherins were more reserved, staring silently into space.

"Please, feel free to treat Hogwarts as your home for the next one whole year. Mingle amongst the students, and form new friendships... Should you need anything, feel free to approach our Professors; they would be most delighted to help you!" Dumbledore proclaimed loudly as he spread his arms wide open in an inviting gesture.

Harry snorted. Judging by the expression on Snape's face, he highly doubted it. The Slytherin Head looked as though he would not tolerate mistakes even from the Durmstrang students and would not hesitate to give them detentions.

"And now, we would like to invite the Head Boy and Girl of Durmstrang to give us a little speech!" Dumbledore continued, his eyes twinkling madly. "Up here, come on!" he waved towards them.

Without warning, both Harry and Celeste were shoved towards the platform of the teacher's table. Harry shrugged off the hands of the person shoving him irritably and gritted his teeth as he rose fluidly and made his way to the middle of the platform. He caught Celeste's eye and he nodded, a tiny bit. What was Dumbledore playing at, trying to catch him by surprise? He wasn't informed there would be such a thing and hadn't prepared.

Harry found himself staring into the curious eyes of the Hogwarts students and allowed a cool smile to wash over his face, letting his aura flare out in a gentle, pleasing way. The students immediately

relaxed, happy smiles on their faces as they regarded him. He was aware that Celeste had stood next to him, smiling in greeting as well.

He took a deep breath and said smoothly, "Representing the students of Durmstrang, we would like to thank the Headmaster Dumbledore and of course, the Board of Government for giving us an opportunity to be here at Hogwarts for the Exchange Programme. We hope that each of us will leave Hogwarts with new found friendships," – and allies, Harry added mentally – "and promote the exchange of our cultures from both countries." He gave a calm smile and the students seemed to be entranced by him.

A loud applaud rang across the room at the simple, yet polite speech. The students were kept happy and satisfied with his calming aura which seemed to brighten their spirits. Harry supposed he could have done better but this would suffice for the time being. Dumbledore couldn't say his speech was wrong. He thanked everyone that needed to be thanked and was polite enough.

"Excellent, excellent," Dumbledore said and rose from his seat once more when he and Celeste exited the platform. "If there are no further questions, we can begin the Sorting which I know everyone is excited about."

Immediately, whispered questions travelled in the room. The Hogwarts students looked confused, all staring up at Dumbledore who merely waved his hand.

"Sorting?" some students asked, mainly from the Hogwarts students. They had quizzical expressions on their faces as they all stared up to Dumbledore, as though hoping for an answer.

Dumbledore smiled as he addressed them. "As said earlier on, this exchange visit is to promote cultural exchange as well as to have international magical co-operation. Sorting the students from Durmstrang into the four different houses will ensure that the students are more united within their own houses and forming a tight bond with them."

Most of the students looked convinced with Dumbledore's answer, but a few did not.

The Slytherins were scowling at Dumbledore although they tried to hide their irritation at Dumbledore, though Harry could tell that they were excited to meet students from Durmstrang who studied Dark Arts. Harry always thought that the rule forbidding Dark Arts to be taught at Hogwarts was a joke and he could tell that the Slytherins had the same views. The Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs were beaming eagerly, hoping that some exchange students would be in their houses. Harry snorted. He would sooner die than be sorted with the Gryffindors.

No, he would never end up in the same house as his dratted, arrogant brother with any power to speak of. Only the Ravenclaws looked genuinely interested and curious to mingle and get to know the foreign students better.

"And now, let the sorting begin!" Dumbledore announced cheerily and he waved his wand in a wide flourish.

A large, tatty old hat appeared and Dumbledore set it down on a stool on the teacher's platform. Harry instantly recognised it as the Sorting Hat from the numerous books he read and was itching to go over and examine the hat. The hat was said to be created by the four Hogwarts founders and was very ancient and powerful object.

The few Durmstrang students who had not heard of the Sorting Hat were looking at the hat in bemusement and puzzlement and the others explained the Sorting Hat and its powers to them. They looked unconvinced and Harry could understand why. The Hat didn't look like an ancient, powerful object to him if he did not know what it was. Sure, it did look old, but it was patched and if he couldn't feel the magical presence emitting from the hat, he would have thought that it was just another old wizard hat.

Dumbledore conjured a roll of parchment from nowhere and peered down on it with his half moon spectacles. Harry had a vague suspicion what the parchment was and was not disappointed in his guess.

"I will now call forth the names of each student who will then place the Sorting Hat upon their heads. For those of you who are unclear of the purpose of the hat, it will sort you into the four houses of Hogwarts. There are Gryffindor," Dumbledore said loudly and cheers erupted from the table at the far left. "Ravenclaw," a few older

Ravenclaws whistled while the others clapped enthusiastically, "Hufflepuff," the Hufflepuffs waved and beamed cheerfully, "and Slytherin," Dumbledore finished, his voice going slightly disapproving at the last house. The Slytherin table did not erupt into the shrill cheers but merely nodded curtly, clapping politely.

"Gryffindors are known for their chivalry and their bravery," Dumbledore continued, pausing when cheers erupted once more from the Gryffindors. Harry saw Joshua clapping particularly hard and Dumbledore shot a fond look towards him. Harry sneered just as Dumbledore said, "Ravenclaws are famed for their wit and knowledge. Hufflepuffs are loyal to boot as well as patient, kind and friendly while Slytherins are cunning and have ambition. I myself, am a Gryffindor as you might know."

Harry's eyes narrowed shrewdly at Dumbledore's take on Slytherin. He hadn't missed out the fact that Dumbledore highlighted the difference between Hufflepuffs and Slytherins with the word 'while'. He scowled, as did several of the Slytherins who were either glaring at Dumbledore or maintain a stoic expression.

Dumbledore seemed oblivious to the reaction he gained on the take of the Slytherins but Harry saw the twinkle in his eyes brighten even more if it were possible.

"It is customary that we sort students alphabetically, however, would the two Heads of Durmstrang like to go first?" Dumbledore turned towards Celeste and Harry as did the rest of Hogwarts.

Harry plastered a smile on his face while he fumed silently. He raised his voice slightly as he addressed Dumbledore politely.

"Thank you, Headmaster, but Celeste and I would not like to break Hogwarts traditions at all," he said with a smile, his voice persuasive. Several students looked convinced by him and smiled warmly as well. He sneered mentally at their naivety.

An annoyed look flashed passed Dumbledore's aged face but he quickly covered it up with a merry smile.

"If that's the case," Dumbledore said. "Then we will begin our sorting, starting from Caspar, Lesley!" he announced.

A tall blonde strode forward quickly towards the hat, confidence brimming off her. Harry instantly recognised her as a seventh year pureblood Sorcier. She was one of the more skilled Duellers at Durmstrang but her quick temper made her classmates hesitant towards her and more careful with their words. Though, Harry had to admit, she would make a good ally in the war with her connections to the Bulgarians.

Lesley placed the hat on her head carefully, a wary look on her face. The hat sat on her head and she looked steadily more annoyed as the minutes passed silently. Finally, her face slacked and her shoulders hunched slightly – as though she was caving in to the Hat. The hat made a satisfied sound before it shouted "Slytherin!" to the Great Hall after a few seconds.

Lesley wrenched the hat from her head as she made her way towards the clapping Slytherins who nodded with approval at her last name. She looked pleased with her house and settled in with the Slytherins, engaging them in a conversation.

The sorting continued, with another two students getting into Slytherins. The tradition was broke with the fourth student to be sorted who got into Gryffindor. The Gryffindor table erupted into loud cheers as they waved her over and the girl who got sorted there looked furious at the hat for separating her with her friends. She sat stiffly with the Gryffindors, ignoring their attempts to talk to her and they gradually left her alone.

The fifth student went into Ravenclaw, as did the sixth student. They looked slightly happier than the unfortunate girl in Gryffindor although they were disappointed all the same.

Finally, it was Harry's turn. He flashed Draco a reassuring smirk and Draco nodded. Celeste gave him a thumbs up and he said quickly to her, "Your Occulmency shields." And she nodded.

"Riddle, Harrison," Dumbledore said loudly, his blue eyes on him unwaveringly.

Harry ignored Dumbledore and made his way to the Sorting Hat gracefully and calmly. He knew what house he wanted and would make sure that he got it. He caught Snape's eyes which were on him, a shrewd expression on his sour face and allowed a small

smirk to grace his lips. He purposefully avoided looking at Lily and James Potter, concentrating on the hat in front of him.

And he jammed the hat on his head and started employing every ounce of Occulmency with all his might, in spite of his natural Occulmency shields. He carefully avoided looking at his brother who was staring straight at him and settled at looking at the main doors opposite him.

And the hat started to converse with him mentally.

'Ahh, Mr Riddle, would you mind letting me in behind your shields for a moment to sort you?' the Hat asked, its voice weary and tired.

'No, just sort me to Slytherin,' Harry responded curtly and tightened his shields.

The hat seemed to sigh mentally. 'Mr Riddle, I have already had a very trying time to sort the first six students. Miss Caspar for one, was very, very stubborn and simply refused to let me into her mind to sort her.'

'Just sort me into Slytherin.' Harry repeated.

'Mr Riddle, I am the one who sorts you, not you who dictate where I place you,' the hat said, sounding insulted and annoyed.

'So sort me then, but I'm not letting you into my shields without a fight. You are loyal to Dumbledore and the school and there are things I don't want to make known.'

'I am bound by an oath to not reveal anything I see in the student's mind,' the Hat said quickly, trying to reassure Harry.

'Oaths can be broken.'

'Mr Riddle!' the Hat said in exasperation.

'You can get into my mind by force if you wish to. I however, will put up a fight,' Harry retorted stubbornly.

The Hat sighed. 'I can enter a student's mind by force even if the hat was build to sort students of eleven years old and who do not have

Occulmency shields. I cannot, however enter the minds of a student who possesses the Gift.'

'The – what?' Harry spluttered sharply, his calm demeanour broken. 'How do you know about the Gift?'

'Simply because I can sense your Occulmency barriers. You have the natural barriers which come from the Gift you possess. Normal Occulmency barriers are weaker than the natural ones which are why I can enter the students mind usually to sort them, no matter how powerful the barrier is. However, the Aura Gift is a rarity and usually not mastered at eleven,' the Hat explained. "Miss Caspar possesses a fraction of the gift – inherited from her grandmother if I am not mistaken," the Hat continued.

Harry looked thoughtful as he considered. 'And is there anything else you can sense from me?' he asked curiously.

'Aha!' the Hat exclaimed in victory. 'I can sense your heritage.'

'My heritage?' Harry said quickly, his worst fears confirmed.

'The Heritage only if you are descended from the four founders who created me. I would be able to tell if you descended by any of the four founders. And you, Mr Riddle are more than you seem, are you not?' the Hat declared triumphantly.

'None of your business but you can tell me what my heritage is,' Harry retorted. Perhaps the Hat knew of the Le Feys? That would bring him one step closer in discovering his possession of the Le Fey Curse.

'Only if you let me sort you,' the Hat said in a victorious tone. 'A fair trade, I believe.'

'No.'

'Then Mr Riddle, I will not tell you,' the Hat said smugly.

'Fine,' Harry huffed mentally. 'Don't sort me and we'll sit here for hours and hours. I told you I am Slytherin. And it's a definitely but you will tell me my Heritage before you sort me.'

'Nothing is definite,' the Hat retorted. 'And you would only know where you belong if you let me into your barriers. I need to sort you, Mr Riddle. There are still students waiting. You won't want to keep your schoolmates waiting, do you? I am bound by an oath, if you are worried.'

'No and that's final,' Harry said firmly. 'I will not let you in and risk you finding out anything. How did you convince Lesley to sort her?'

The Hat smirked mentally and ignored Harry's question. 'Then Mr Riddle, I will have no choice but to sort you into Gryffindor.'

Harry had a sudden, wild image of the Hat shouting Gryffindor and immediately yelled to it, 'No! You can't!' he said quickly.

'I can, Mr Riddle. You do possess bravery to defy the Sorting Hat. That's a Gryffindor quality,' the Hat said happily. 'So it's Gryffindor then? Mr Riddle, you belong in –'

"GRYFFIND-"

'Silencio!' Harry thought wildly and the Hat was silenced in mid word. However, the students had already heard the first part of it and gasps filled the hall, especially from the students of Durmstrang.

'Mr Riddle?' the Hat exclaimed mentally. 'Why you – !'

Harry smirked, now that he had calmed down. 'I couldn't let you get away with it, could I? A simple Silencio and you are dealt with,' he snickered. 'I must say, I never thought it would be possible but then again, you're a magical object, no matter how powerful you are, are you not? And magical objects can be subjected to incantations and hexes.'

The Hat huffed angrily. 'No one's done it before. You're the first, how could it be possible, by Merlin! But release my speech at once, I say!'

'Not if you tell me my Heritage,' Harry said smugly.

The Hat looked defeated. It looked as though it would reply when suddenly, Harry was interrupted by Professor Dumbledore who was walking towards him.

"Ah, Mr Riddle," Dumbledore said cheerfully, his face a beaming mask and he held out his hand towards Harry. "The Gryffindor table, if you please." He pointed towards the table with his other hand. It was towards the students in red and gold that Dumbledore pointed to.

Harry looked at Dumbledore in bemusement and defiance. "To tell the truth, Professor," he said in a voice of politeness and smiled calmly, "the Hat has not sorted me yet."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled madly. "Ah, Mr Riddle. The school has heard the Hat proclaim you as a Gryffindor. Further discussions with the Sorting Hat will not change that fact."

Angry titters filled the room from the Slytherin table, especially Draco who was protesting loudly.

"Actually, Professor, what the Hat actually said was 'Gryffind'. To the best of my knowledge, there is no such house at Hogwarts," Harry smirked. He couldn't help it. He was one up on the meddling old coot and his reason was complete rubbish although technically, he was correct.

Dumbledore looked outraged. He looked as though he would argue when Harry interrupted him smoothly.

"The Hat has not come to a conclusion as of yet. If you would kindly excuse me, I would like to continue the Sorting now that I have reached a compromise with the Hat." He waved Dumbledore off who fumed silently and grudgingly retreated, his eyes twinkling more madly than ever.

'Sorry about that minor interruption,' Harry said to the Hat mentally once Dumbledore was back at his seat. The Hat seemed to snort.

'Dumbledore's always doing that,' the Hat grumbled. Harry was curious at once. Was the Hat unhappy with Dumbledore then? That was unheard of.

'Would you let me into your barriers now?' the Hat said, ignoring Harry's thoughts. 'No information would be leaked and I would tell you of your Heritage, I can assure you about that.'

Harry hesitated and finally said, 'If you will. But I have your word about the secrecy, if not, Hogwarts's Sorting Hat will be a thing of the past. If a silencing charm works, then I'm sure an Incendio will also work.' Harry said threateningly.

The Hat grumbled sullenly in response, muttering about overly violent students and consented.

Having said that, Harry mentally removed his Occulmency barriers and could feel the Hat sifting through the memories for a long time. The Hat seemed interested at Harry's life and was making 'Ooh' and 'Ah' every few seconds, it's previous sullen mood replaced by the normally curious and upbeat tone. After what seemed like eternity, Harry felt the Hat retreat from his mind gently and relaxed slightly. He had been stiff the whole time the Hat was intruding his mind, particularly during his childhood.

'Quite a life you had, Mr Riddle,' the Hat said, deciding to ignore the topic of Harry's past for which Harry was grateful for. 'Plenty of courage, I see, to go through the decision you made years back. Gryffindor would suit you and yet, you have fierce loyalty towards those you care about. Hufflepuff might fit you as well. Ravenclaw could also be your house – I see you have plenty of knowledge and curiosity which drives several Ravenclaws. But Slytherin! Where do I start? You certainly have ambition and a huge one too. Your cunningness is well deserved and I applaud you for that. So where do I put you?'

Harry smiled wryly. 'You make it sound as though I fit every house.'

The Hat nodded and Harry could feel it move at the top of his head. 'You do and since you do, we will start by elimination, shall we? Gryffindor shall be the first to go. I highly doubt that you will be happy there, seeing as you bear a high grudge towards your brother. It might have fitted you if you never left but not now.'

'Just Slytherin,' Harry persuaded. 'That's where I want to go.'

'No no no,' the Hat said joyfully, sounding excited. 'We will find the house for you! And moving onto Hufflepuff – you undoubtedly have their qualities but you wouldn't want to be there, would you, Mr Riddle?'

Harry scowled. 'No, unless you want me to Incendio you, as said earlier.'

'You might be correct,' the Hat said cheerfully. 'You will not fit well within the happy, friendly souls of Hufflepuff. Your past makes you much more mature and bitter and you will not be comfortable there.'

'Do you always talk so much?'

The Hat ignored him. 'Now – Ravenclaw; It seems like the house for you, don't you think so? Plenty of intelligence and a high curiosity is what set Ravenclaws apart – both of which you possess. Yet you pick Slytherin. Cunningness and ambition and it also seem like the House for you, but I highly implore you to reconsider this.'

'And your reason for that...?'

'Slytherin is generally – no matter how true or not – viewed as the house that is on the Dark Side, while Ravenclaws tend to be seen as more Neutral in the war for they seldom pick sides. It's a matter of perception even if it isn't true and wise to assume. Your identity automatically associates you with the Dark, Mr Riddle. And no doubt, your surname Riddle has piqued the Headmaster's curiosity. He remembers Tom Riddle as well as I do. Your being in Slytherin would automatically convince his suspicions about your identity, but in Ravenclaw, he will have his reservations about you.'

'That might be true,' Harry admitted. 'But I came to Hogwarts with a mission and I need to be in Slytherin for that.'

The Hat sighed, its cheerfulness gone. 'Ah, yes, your mission. While I cannot stop you from doing it, I will have to warn you to be careful. The Headmaster has shrewd suspicions about Mr. Malfoy and it will do you good to be alert around him. However, I would appreciate it if the students weren't harmed.'

Now Harry was startled at the Hat's information. 'But aren't you supposed to be loyal to the Headmaster?'

'I am loyal to the four founders and to Hogwarts, not Dumbledore,' the Hat corrected. 'I suppose this brings us to your Heritage. As you already know, the Potter line is directly descended from Godric

Gryffindor. Your adopted father – Tom Riddle, is also directly descended from Salazar Slytherin. You are thus, descended from both the Gryffindor and Slytherin.'

'That I know, but is that all? Do you know anything about the Le Feys?'

'As far as I know, none of the Potters have been related to the Le Feys,' the Hat said.

An overwhelming shock rushed through Harry. 'But if that is so, then wouldn't – wouldn't it mean that the Le Feys are from Lily Evans's line? The Evans or their ancestors?'

'I cannot tell the lines which are not from the Founder Four, but yes, I surmised as much. I sensed however, that you are distantly descended from Hufflepuff which should have come by your mother's line seeing that the Potters are not descended from them as far as my memory goes. Yet you are only very distantly are you descended from the Hufflepuff line. This also comes to my conclusion that your mother wasn't a muggleborn, but descended from a line of squibs.'

'Did you tell... did you tell Lily that?' Harry asked slowly.

'No,' the Hat said and it smirked slightly. 'She never asked me. She was begging for Gryffindor the whole time.'

'Figures,' Harry muttered, thinking about an eleven years old girl with dark red hair and bright green eyes eagerly begging to be sorted into Gryffindor. 'Thanks anyway.'

'Anytime,' the Hat replied airily. 'And back to the more important question, what house do you wish to be in?'

'Slytherin,' Harry said automatically. 'Just Slytherin. If it wasn't for the mission, I might consider Ravenclaw. But not today – there are more important things as you know.'

'And who am I to refuse you, young Mr Riddle? If you must, then Slytherin it will be. I will caution you to be careful again, however. Dumbledore is not as senile as he may seem, nor is he as benign as he might act like.'

'I'll take the risks,' Harry said. 'But thanks all the same. Imagine the look on Dumbledore's face later when you proclaim me as Slytherin.'

The Hat laughed in his head. 'Mr Riddle, things are going to be very interesting with you here. It was nice talking to you – I've never talked so long to anyone even if it were about Heritage. Right then, shall we not keep the rest of the students waiting? Mind though; visit me sometimes if you have the chance,' the Hat ordered and Harry chuckled. "Right, you shall get your desired house..."

"SLYTHERIN!" the Hat shouted the last word.

Loud applause rang from the Slytherins, particularly from Draco who was clapping wildly, his face a wide beaming smile as he waved. Harry pulled off the Hat from his head with a flourish and smiled slightly to it. He could have sworn that he saw the Hat wink at him, but the next moment, he was off the platform and walking towards the Slytherin table.

Harry paused on mid step to the Slytherins and turned to face Dumbledore. The Headmaster had a furious look in his face and his eyes were bright with anger which was hurriedly disguised by his aged grandfatherly look. Harry caught Dumbledore's eyes and flashed a huge, smug smile in which Dumbledore glared at him in response.

The next moment, he was quickly pulled to the Slytherin table by Draco who was patting him on his back happily. Harry caught Celeste's eye and waved to her and nodded once.

"What was that?" Draco demanded once the Sorting resumed and the students turned away from them.

The rest of the Slytherins stared at the two of them and Harry cleared his throat consciously.

"Later," he whispered to Draco before raising his voice slightly. "Harrison Riddle," he introduced and held out his hand to the Slytherins.

They shook his hands and said their names one by one. The girls seemed fluttered by his attention; the boys seemed interested to

know more about Durmstrang. He barely paid attention to their conversation but nodded politely all the same. He wouldn't bungle this up by offending the Slytherins who could be of use to him in future.

"Harry – Celeste!" Draco said excitedly as Celeste was called to be sorted. She gracefully made her way towards the Sorting Hat and placed it on her head. Her eyes found Harry and he reassured her with a nod. She seemed to be convinced and allowed the Hat to sort through her memories.

"Slytherin!" the Hat cried after two minutes and Celeste joined the Slytherin's table, a satisfied look on her face as she sat opposite Harry and Draco. Pansy immediately started talking to Celeste and she patiently replied her although she looked annoyed by Pansy's constant chatters and shrill laughter.

Draco snickered and Celeste shot him a death glare. Harry smirked at the pair of them.

The last student was soon sorted and Dumbledore started his speech once more.

"Now that we are all sorted and settled comfortably in our houses, let the members of each house give you a tour around Hogwarts which will be your home for the rest of the year. Durmstrang exchange students who are taking lessons that are not conducted at Hogwarts," Dumbledore's voice became grandfatherly disapproving, "it will be conducted by your own Professors from Durmstrang at weekends or time slots where you are available. For now, you may enjoy the weekend ahead until lessons begin on Monday."

Dumbledore stood and waved his hand in dismissal. Instantly, the students quickly filed out of the Great Hall and Harry followed behind Draco and his Slytherin gang.

"So what exactly was the hat telling you earlier?" Draco asked once they were out of earshot.

Harry told them quietly about his argument with the Hat and Celeste laughed at him. Draco looked bewildered and highly disbelieving seeing that his own sorting had been over in a matter of seconds.

He excluded the part about his Heritage for neither Draco nor Celeste knew about his identity as Harry Potter.

"You're unbelievable," Draco said once Harry finished retelling his story.

"Tell the Hat that," Harry retorted. "It simply refused to just sort me into Slytherin and even threatened to put me into Gryffindor if I hadn't silenced it."

Draco rolled his eyes. "You're absolutely unbelievable. Silencing the Sorting Hat?" he repeated.

Celeste shook her head disapprovingly. "Well I think that was a marvellous trick on Harry's part. Besides, imagine what would happen if he went to Gryffindor?"

"No bloody way!" Draco exclaimed as they rounded a corridor. "Harry is Slytherin through and through," he proclaimed.

"That's what I tried to tell the Hat," Harry said wryly.

"You attract trouble," Draco announced and he paused, staring around before asking, "Do you want to go to Slytherin's common rooms first? It's down by the dungeons."

Harry and Celeste agreed and Draco led them to the room, accompanied by the Slytherin gang who seemed disgruntled that Draco was ignoring them and talking all the time to the Durmstrang visitors.

"Draco?" Blaise Zabini asked hesitantly after a few minutes passed. "How did you and the Durmstrang visitors meet? You seem like you...know them."

Draco huffed and he turned around to face Blaise. "Of course I know them," he said slightly defensive. "Well... Harry and I met at the ... ah Malfoy Manor when we were kids and ... Celeste and I have a long history."

Celeste rolled her eyes.

"We've never heard you talk about them," Theodore said curiously. "You never mentioned about your friends at Durmstrang," Theodore's eye moved towards Harry and Celeste.

"Excuse me, but the 'them' in question happens to be listening. Do you mind taking your conversation elsewhere?" Harry interrupted smoothly.

Eyes turned towards him, which he ignored. "Perhaps it would be prudent if you showed our fellow schoolmates around Hogwarts," Harry said, gesturing towards the rest of the Durmstrang students who were sorted into Slytherin, which unfortunately included Drayvers. "I'm sure Celeste and I can find our way to the Dungeons."

"No you don't," Draco cut in. "I've waited ages and finally, you and Celeste are at Hogwarts!"

Celeste looked slightly amused. "Were you that starved for company, Draco?"

Draco spluttered incoherently. "O – of course not!" he said quickly. And he tugged Harry and Celeste by their arms and hurried them away and to the common rooms, leaving the rest of the Slytherins behind, without their leader. They looked displeased at Draco and Pansy was almost shrieking in horror at being abandoned.

The distance to the common room was a short one, with Draco leading Harry and Celeste through a series of short cuts which he discovered throughout his years at Hogwarts. The portraits at Hogwarts were extremely talkative and often attempted to engage them into a conversation as they passed, with Draco ignoring them and Celeste looking at them in fascination. Twice, she wanted to stop and talk to the portraits but Draco merely stunned the portrait she was conversing with, causing Celeste to start berating him.

Five minutes went by and they were down at the dungeons. Draco gave the password 'Ambition' and they entered the common room. Harry's first impression was that the room was fairly large, and Slytherins of all ages sat on the chairs and couches, either conversing quietly or staring into space.

"So this is Hogwarts? I suppose Durmstrang has more privacy," Celeste mused, looking around once they were down in the common rooms. She ignored the stares that she gained from the other students as she walked around the room, observing.

"What's with the green light?" she asked after a while.

"It's been like this since Hogwarts was founded," Draco scowled. "Slytherin colours."

"Well, it looks like a thousand Avada Kedavras illuminating the room to me," Celeste commented, missing Draco's glower at her. "Yes ... Slytherins have an interesting taste... you don't suppose a normal light would suffice?"

"Don't be stupid," Draco retorted. "And you are a Slytherin as well," Draco pointed out and Celeste snorted.

"So here's where the great Malfoy Heir lived," Celeste said loudly and Draco looked at her in horror at the attention that her words gained from the crowds of Slytherins who were sneaking glances at them.

"I never said that!" Draco protested, motioning for her to keep her voice down at the Slytherins who were pointedly listening to their conversations.

"Sorry, my mistake," Celeste said sweetly and rose her voice, "Hogwarts is where the greatest and most intelligent Malfoy lived."

Sniggers echoed through the room but were immediately ceased and silenced with one of Draco's glares.

"Celeste Travers!" Draco said furiously once the Slytherins turned away. "I never – I never said that!"

Celeste ignored him haughtily and Draco scowled at her back which she turned on him to face Harry. "So Harry, what do you think of Hogwarts?" Celeste asked as she looked around, taking joy in purposefully ignoring Draco's glare at her which she airily pretended not to notice.

Harry cast a glance around the common room and thought back about the Great Hall, the Black Lake, the grounds and the corridors before he took his time to reply.

"I think it's impressive." Harry was surprised to find that his answer was genuine.

"See, the green light does not scare Harry like it does to you," Draco said triumphantly to Celeste.

"That was your assumption," Celeste replied loftily.

Draco tugged Harry by the arm and pulled him towards a staircase at the side of the common room, leaving Celeste standing in the middle of the common room, a bemused expression on her face. "I'll bring Harry up to the boys' dormitories, and you," he motioned to Celeste, "can ask Pansy to show you to the girls' dormitories. I'm sure you'll have a marvellous time together!"

Ignoring Celeste's incoherent splutter of outrage at being left behind with Pansy Parkinson – can anyone imagine the no-nonsense Celeste with the giggling Pansy together? – Draco quickly ascended the steps to the boys' dormitories where the room was shared with the other Slytherins in sixth year.

"That was cruel of you," Harry said once he and Draco were in the boys dormitories. "You know how much Celeste hates Parkinson."

Draco plopped himself down onto his bed, which was next to the wall and shrugged. "That's the point," he pointed out, before stretching and pointing towards the bed opposite him. "I suppose that's your bed and your belongings have all been brought up."

Harry cast a glance towards his bed but made no move to gather his things. Instead, he turned to Draco and discreetly put up a silencing ward around the boys dormitories.

"Have you figured out where that room with the Vanishing Cabinet is?" he asked, getting straight to the point.

Draco nodded, slowly, thoughtfully. "Yes, it's like what Montague says. You have to walk past it three times for it to appear... but it is

in the middle of a lot of junk and it's in a bad condition." His mouth twisted into a grimace.

"Did you try any repairing spells?"

Draco shook his head. "It looked as though it might collapse you know... if you did anything to it. It's almost broken and well, I doubt it has been used for a long time apart from Montague and he was pushed into it. I don't know what made me think that I could even fix it!"

"It'll work, eventually..." Harry said bracingly. "It's a good thing you didn't do anything though. If the cabinet broke..." his voice trailed off.

"I will be doomed! And worse, Potter and his golden trio have caught onto something!"

Harry turned sharply. "Excuse me?" he demanded.

Draco looked flustered with panic. "That day, before you came, I was exiting from the room when Potter caught me. He's been lingering around the seventh floor ever since and keeps trying to get into the room! Or where he thinks the room is, he's pacing around there with Granger and Weasel."

"You'll have to keep him off track, use a disillusionment charm or something," Harry said. "If he thinks that you aren't going there anymore, maybe he'll back off."

Hopefully his brother's enthusiasm didn't run high like his arrogance.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Yeah, like that will work. Potter would never rest until he figures it out. And besides, I heard Weasel talking about some map in third year at Hogsmead. Potter has this map of Hogwarts that shows the name of everyone in the castle and what they're doing. I think Weasel was boasting as usual but you can't –"

"Wait. So you're saying Potter has a map? A map that shows everyone at Hogwarts and whatever they are doing?"

Draco nodded fervently.

"That's impossible," Harry dismissed. The Joshua he knew was smart and cunning, but not overly so. "He couldn't be intelligent enough to create that sort of map. The charms on it will be complex and way over the level of NEWTs."

"But with the Mudblood, he could have," Draco argued, his voice grudging. "Granger is the brains behind the golden trio when she isn't being an annoying know-it-all and trying to answer every single question the Professor has in class. Potter and Granger put together might be able to create the map – with the help of their favourite Order, so Weasel might be telling the truth."

Harry turned away from Draco and stared into space and an idea struck him immediately – if the map truly existed. A grin slowly spread across his face as he imagined the reaction of Joshua Potter. His brother was possessive, very possessive. Harry didn't spend years with the Dark Lord and learning to be a Slytherin for nothing.

He smirked, the plan formulating in his mind.

"Draco, what do you say of showing Potter the qualities of a Slytherin?"

Author's Notes

Hope most of you weren't too disappointed with the house! I was seriously considering Ravenclaw, but Slytherin won by popular vote. There was some Gryffindor bashing (which I agree with) and those who voted Hufflepuff gave an interesting view as well.

Important: School has started so updates might be irregular. So I came up with two very straightforward choices.

Choice 1 - Shorter updates (5000-6000 words) but a quicker updating time.

Choice 2 - Longer updates (7000 words) but update time slower to maybe 3 to 4 weeks or beyond if there's any exams or major assignments/SIAs.

So, which choice do you want?

& thanks to everyone who bore with me for this long chapter. I really appreciate everyone for reading it! Please review if you have the time, and if you do, you might want to indicate your choice :)

Happy New Year!

12. Time doesn't change a thing

A loud huff and a pillow flew through the air and landed on a lone, stirring figure with a light thump. A split second passed before a groan of annoyance and a slight shift in posture was the only reaction that was given by the sleeping wizard.

Harry lay in his bed, his head burrowing into his pillow, the covers covering his body when he felt something soft and large hit him lightly on the head and he groaned, wanting silence and peace while he slept on.

It seemed a long time ago that he had just come to Hogwarts when it was only yesterday. Draco had dragged Harry and Celeste to every corner of Hogwarts – the grounds, the Black Lake, each secret passage way he discovered, the Astronomy Tower, the empty classrooms, the queer Divination classroom – where they quickly fled when they caught sight of the even queerer Professor Trelawney hurrying towards their direction –, Gryffindor and Ravenclaw Towers, and even empty broom cupboards and finally, the kitchen.

Harry still remembered the overly enthusiastic house elves which bustled around them, trying valiantly to convince him to bring back to Slytherin common room another pastry or... ten.

It had been a long day, but Harry had to admit that it was fun, exploring the great ancient castle of Hogwarts to a deeper depth. The rest of the Slytherins had led the other Slytherin-Durmstrang students around the school, giving them privacy to themselves. Harry could still visualise how Pansy Parkinson clutched onto Draco's arm, simply refusing to part ways with him and lead the other Durmstrang students until Celeste finally put her foot down – after ten minutes of Pansy's shrill whining and wails – and threatened Draco that she would leave first. Draco was quickly convinced and they disappeared in a flash, leaving behind a semi-hysterical Pansy who was forcibly restrained by the other Slytherins.

On the other hand, Harry was glad that he hadn't seen his brother after the first time in the Great Hall. He didn't know how he should react – well, there weren't books to tell you how you should act and what you should say when you saw your brother after ten long years. Fortunately, the Gryffindors kept to their side of the castle as did the

Slytherins for which he was grateful of – though disappointed that he hadn't had a chance to pay back his brother and show him that he wasn't the Harry of before.

While he did not see his brother, he caught sight of Lily Potter several times, accompanied by James Potter, and occasionally, Sirius Black both of who were all smiles and laughing the whole time. Lily was wary towards the Durmstrang students and that was obvious. When she caught sight of him and Celeste, accompanied by Draco, her cheerful laughter diminished to be replaced by a calculative and careful look within her eyes as she slowly side stepped them, her wariness only gone when they were out of sight.

Not that Harry was much affected, although Celeste looked affronted.

The next thing Harry knew was that someone was next to him, shaking him hard and his body shook in wild tremors as he fought to close his eyes and continue in his peaceful sleep and immersing in his recollections. Even so, a low growl escaped him as a loud distant voice rang like a hundred bells in his ears, creating a dizzy echo.

"Wake up, up now, Harry!" Draco said impatiently as he shook his friend. In his left hand was a crumpled piece of parchment, rolled into a tight ball.

"What now?" Harry said, slightly dazed as he slowly sat up straight, wondering if a meteorite had hit the Earth, causing him to be awoken so early. He also realised that Draco could have an annoyingly high voice when he whined.

His vision focused and he saw the tall figure of Draco in front of him, an excited beaming smile upon him.

"Quidditch! I've got permission from Professor Snape to use the Quidditch Pitch now! And it's the Gryffindor's turn to use it – but what matters is Professor Snape allows me!" Draco cried triumphantly, waving the parchment in his hands.

Harry wanted to reach out and curse Draco into a ball of slime. Really, Draco had awoke him up early in the morning just to tell him that he had permission to play Quidditch? He wanted to strangle his friend.

"You woke me up so early, to tell me you can play Quidditch?" he growled and could not help noticing that his voice had risen threateningly.

Draco backed away from him just as a curse missed him and hit the bedside where Draco only stood recently.

"Be a good sport – wait till you see the Gryffindor's faces. The other time we overtook the pitch because of Professor Snape's permission, Weasel ended up vomiting slugs, can you imagine?" Draco sniggered. "Besides, it's not early in the morning. It's half past nine and you are usually a morning person."

Harry blinked as he took in his surroundings and realised that Draco was right, as usual. The magical window in the boys' dormitories showed sunlight streaming through the room and the other occupants of the dorm had left for breakfast already.

Harry rolled over in his bed as he sat up straight.

"You're Quidditch Captain, then?" Harry said, eyeing the badge on Draco's robes. Draco huffed indignantly.

"Of course I am, didn't you notice?" Draco said as he dragged Harry out of his bed. "Celeste and Pansy are already down there waiting for you to go show up the Gryffindors and Celeste says if you leave her there with Pansy for another minute, she'll hex you the moment she sees you."

Harry chuckled just as Draco continued, musing, "How Weasley can ever make it to the Gryffindor team, I don't know," Draco shook his head perplexedly. "But I suppose having your best mate as the Quidditch Captain does help. And Granger is a total loser on the broom. In first year she even tried to memorise Quidditch through the ages! Not that it did help," Draco added, apparently recalling his first year. "Her broom tried to buck her off." A wide smile spread across his face in glee.

Harry's thoughts cleared slightly. Joshua was the Quidditch Captain of Gryffindor team then? It would be the first time that he finally saw his brother face-to-face and it would most presumably be a fight for the Quidditch Pitch.

Harry looked forward to it; he realised and almost snorted when he thought of his brother flying around in an expensive broom as he yelled instructions to his team mates like the arrogant prat he was. He supposed that Joshua inherited that particular ability from his father who was just as air headed though he grudgingly admitted that Joshua could fly... well.

He made his way to the bathroom, shaking Draco off as he did so. His father and brother were almost identical – both were arrogant, pig headed and oblivious to everyone but themselves. They flaunted their talents and neither of them saw the advantages of remaining in the shadows and observing others.

They loved the spotlight.

Though, he had his reservations about his brother. When he saw Joshua in the Great Hall yesterday, Joshua's eyes had a tinge of rebellion, wariness and suspicion and that there was more to the overly cheerful Gryffindor Golden Boy than it seemed. It was like a leadership command of power and Harry could not help wondering if his brother could amount to anything more than an arrogant prick who was nothing more but a manipulated puppet of Dumbledore's.

Did his brother wake up?

Well, Harry thought. He would find that out, eventually.

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The Slytherin locker room. The stuffy, overcrowded locker room was what Harry was currently trapped in and he tried not to let it bother him too much and tuned out Draco's voice while his thoughts strayed away.

Why couldn't Draco had found a better place than to conduct his preparation talks? He grumbled to himself. It was funny how the Malfoy Heir didn't seem to notice that the locker room was not a place that was suited for the prestigious Malfoys to host their prep talks.

Draco had previously unceremoniously dragged him and Celeste down to the Slytherin locker room near the Quidditch Pitch while he

addressed his team members. The Durmstrang students who were sorted into Slytherin were there as well, all of them standing near him as they listened to Draco address the Slytherin Quidditch Team.

He watched as Drayvers leaned back against the locker, his arms folded as his eyes followed Draco who was instructing his team members for their pitch invasion. Drayvers had a narrowed look in his eyes which were filled with displeasure and malice and Harry watched him intently. Finally, Drayvers turned away from Draco and instead, spoke quietly to his side-kick, who nodded and smirked.

Harry's eyes narrowed in suspicion, his wand out just in case.

What was Drayvers up to now?

A faint blue light left the tip of Drayvers's wand and came into contact with Draco's Quidditch robes, emitting a faint smoke, causing the robes to sizzle and burn. Harry frowned as he lifted his wand and extinguished the smoke silently, and his eyes darted back to Drayvers. Draco hadn't noticed anything, but Drayvers certainly realised of Harry's presence and he flushed an angry red before slumbering back to his spot at the back.

'It's not the end,' Drayvers mouthed to Harry.

Harry glared back, threateningly, warning him not to do anything while he vaguely wondered what Draco did to offend Drayvers. The two hadn't met before this year...

"And Harry!" Draco said, pulling him over to the centre of the Slytherins who looked at him, their expressions reserved. Harry turned towards Draco, having not followed his conversation and now tried to look as though he was following Draco.

"This are Crabbe and Goyle, Beaters; Harper, Riley and Cosmo, Chasers; Miles who is the keeper and myself – the Seeker," Draco introduced, pointing to each individual who nodded. Harry briefly accessed their auras, and noted with satisfaction that Cosmo and Harper had a strong affinity for Dark Art. He turned his gaze towards Crabbe and Goyle who had a look of displeasure and... jealousy? trained on him and noted that the two of them relied on their massive size and not magical power.

In short, muggle duelling.

Harry briefly wondered again if Crabbe and Goyle were really purebloods.

"Remember," Draco stressed. "We have Professor Snape's special permission so the pitch is ours. Try to aim and curse Weasel like before if there's a fight – his reaction is one to remember and the Mudblood will surely be there too, curse her if you get a chance."

And with that, Draco turned and made his way towards the Quidditch Pitch, the team members following behind him. Harry still kept his watch at Drayvers, who looked disgruntled at following behind Draco, but it was that or accompanying Pansy and her gang at the common room reading *Witch Weekly* or *Ten-Ways-To-Make-Your-Nails-Shine*.

They neared the pitch and Harry saw a few Hogwarts students lingering at the stands and seven figures clad in red and gold in mid-air, doing a series of twists and dives while shouting noisily the whole way.

Harry saw his brother immediately, attempting to perform a Wronski Feint which resulted in a rather humiliating failure. His brother tried to brush it off while circling the pitch, yelling at the team members at the same time to cover up. Harry could tell that Joshua was trying – and failing – to act like a Quidditch star, high and mighty, lording over his team members.

Well, old habits die hard, Harry supposed.

All of this stopped when they approached, Harry was satisfied to notice.

Joshua Potter abandoned his wild dive and dismounted from his broom, with his team behind him as he strode forward quickly and angrily towards Draco who halted in midstep and sneered at the Gryffindors. His eyebrows were contracted and held a superior look as he eyed the Gryffindors in distaste.

Celeste stood beside him, her eyes wide with bemusement. Evidently, Draco meant what he said about his pitch invasion.

"What's the meaning of this, Malfoy?" Joshua snarled; his voice loud even from a far as he made his way to Draco, swaggeringly. He jabbed Draco on the chest angrily. "What's this now? Is it another pitch invasion or another note from the greasy Snivellus? We booked the pitch!" his voice rose indignantly and the Gryffindors behind him nodded fiercely as one. "So clear off!"

The Slytherins sniggered and Malfoy drew himself to full height as he dug around his robes for the permission slip which he held it up to Joshua.

"It is a note from Professor Snape and I will assure you, the news of his name will reach his ears," Draco said coolly.

Joshua gritted his teeth and his eyes flashed angrily.

Draco cleared his throat loudly and importantly. "I, Professor Severus Snape, hereby give the Slytherin Quidditch Team to use the Quidditch Pitch owing to the need to give the students of Durmstrang a demonstration and a tour," Draco read off from the slip, watching as the loud mouthed Gryffindors shrieked with indignation and promptly began to protest and argue, their broomsticks being chucked against the floor in their anger.

The screeching was getting on Harry's nerves and he drew out his wand discreetly, hoping that he didn't have to silence the whole bunch of Gryffindors.

It wouldn't be a good impression of him after all, though he had to admit, impressions didn't bother him too much.

Harry watched closely as Joshua leapt forward and tore the parchment out of Draco's outstretched fingers before sneering at it in disrespect and proceeding to tear it into pieces before throwing it high in the air. His eyes were alight with anger and disgust at the Professor's note.

"What's this?" he said loudly towards his team members who were all scowling at the Slytherins and itching to curse them. "Owing to the need to give the students of Durmstrang a demonstration and a tour? What in Merlin's pants is this rubbish?" His eyes roved over to the Durmstrang students. His eyes narrowed. "You can give them a

tour any other time. It's an excuse," he sneered and the Gryffindors nodded as one and resumed the argument.

A particular red-haired boy who Harry recognised from description as Ronald Weasley advanced towards Draco furiously but was quickly pulled back by the Mudblood.

"Look! It's ferret!" Weasley said mockingly as he struggled against Granger and the Gryffindors laughed loudly at Draco. Harry was thankful to note that Draco didn't give another childish retort although judging by the ice-cool gaze from his friend, he knew that Draco's restraint couldn't last much longer though it seemed as though his friend had the ability to behave – only in front of blood traitors and mudbloods to show his superiority.

"What now, Malfoy?" Weasley spat. "Think that a note from Professor Snape would make us clear off? We booked the pitch, and you are not going to make us move!"

Draco sneered. "You heard Professor Snape. Clear off the pitch."

The Gryffindors stood rooted to the spot, refusing to clear off, their posture tense and wands out. Clearly, they were refusing to go without a fight.

Harry had to roll his eyes. Foolish Gryffindor bravery.

Their eyes were all upon Joshua – their leader – who was swelling with anger and importance as he raised his wand threateningly and chucked his broom on the floor in a dramatic movement.

It rolled to a side.

Harry couldn't believe it – his brother and his arrogance. The way the Gryffindors all looked towards him in respect and belief as though he could really vanquish Lord Voldemort.

He admitted that with all the training, his brother was a decent – if not one of the more powerful – duellist, but he was nothing on Voldemort and Dumbledore expected some kind of a miracle power to manifest itself on Joshua when he came of age? That very idea was laughable.

"No," his brother snarled. "We – bloody – got – here – first!" each word was heavily punctuated.

The Gryffindors roared in approval, their arms flailing wildly.

"Language, Potter," Draco said smoothly and Harry watched as Joshua turn red slightly and smirked slightly. "If you will excuse us, we will take over the pitch and –"

"We've got students from Durmstrang too!" a voice interrupted suddenly. Everyone turned towards the voice who was none other than Hermione Granger, who had pushed her way towards the front and stood beside Joshua, her wild brown hair in disarray, though her eyes were alight with victory. Joshua turned towards Granger, his eyes widening in surprise and Granger nodded quickly before turning back to everyone who was looking at her – the Gryffindors in surprise and the Slytherins in malice and disgust.

Granger looked slightly out of breath and it was clear that she had run from the stands all the way down. She faced the crowd of students and turned slightly pink but cleared her throat loudly.

She pointed towards the lone Durmstrang student sorted into Gryffindor, who was lingering at the back of the group, looking grim, lonely and despondent.

Eyes turned towards the student who promptly dropped her gaze.

"We – need to give her a tour too," Granger panted. "There, Amanda – she's from Durmstrang too."

The Gryffindors's eyes lit up and they nodded together as one and the protests and arguments resumed, with finger pointing and wand waving. The Slytherins looked outraged, but remained outwardly calm. Celeste shot Harry a look which he recognised all too well.

"Is that so?" Draco said coolly, pushing his way towards the Durmstrang student who looked slightly terrified at being cornered by her school mates and the Slytherins.

The Gryffindors tried to shove Draco away but he ignored them.

"Tell me," Draco said quietly, his eyes directly upon the Durmstrang student which Harry recognised as a sixth year Sorcier. "Is it true?"

The coldness was apparent in the voice – there was only one answer and it was a statement, not a question.

The Sorcier shook her head wildly. "No, I never said anything like that!" the Sorcier said quickly. She pointed an accusing finger towards Granger. "She made that up!" she declared. "She lies!"

At least Granger had the decency to flush red.

"You heard her," Draco drawled. "Now clear off. Weasley, you put your wand down. If the curse backfires on you again, I don't think your father could afford you a new wand. The last I heard, the winner of the lucky draw was a rich pureblood, and not you, so give up your wish to win the lucky draw. Send my condolences to your parents – they will need it."

An inarticulate roar of rage and Weasley raised his wand and a purple light left it, yet it never made contact with Draco. Instead, it rebounded off a shield and hit Weasley full in the stomach. He immediately doubled over, choked gasps escaping him before he rolled around on the floor.

Harry stood beside Draco, his wand outstretched and the protective shield in place, enveloping around Draco like a violet bubble. His eyes were cold and hard as he stared coolly at the Gryffindors all of who diverted their attention between him and the moaning Weasley on the ground, their eyes widening as they remembered him from the Sorting Hat.

The boy who almost got sorted into Gryffindor.

Granger gave a shriek of horror and immediately rushed over to Weasley who was laughing uncontrollably on the ground. She quickly gave the counter curse as Weasley seemed to sag and he groaned slightly before fainting backwards.

Joshua moved forward and his eyes fell to Harry for the first time. Harry stiffened as Joshua surveyed him – his eyes in disgust.

"Gained another follower so quickly?" Joshua sneered, his eyes flickering back to Draco.

Harry wanted to rip his brother into pieces but he restrained himself and silently cancelled the protective shields.

Harry shrugged and Joshua seemed to take it as a sign of meek submission.

"I would have thought that Durmstrang taught their students better – to be leaders. Yet, how disappointing to know that I was deeply mistaken," Joshua jeered and continued, "Durmstrang is just a school of Dark Arts, to teach their students to be followers of You-Know-Who. You are a perfect example – you are all servants, destined to kiss his robes. All cowards, lingering at his feet, listening to his insane commands. Cowards," he spat. "Like the Slytherins. I confess myself... disgusted."

Harry never got a chance to curse his brother because someone else beat him to it.

Celeste snarled and aimed a curse at Joshua who immediately side stepped it, his wand snapped into his hand.

"Do note who you are insulting before you mess with the wrong person!" Celeste said coldly and Harry placed an arm on her hand, restraining her. "Never, assume."

Their eyes met and Celeste nodded curtly, her rage dissolving as she retreated behind him, though her snarl was still in place, her eyes narrowed in anger.

"Ganging up?" Joshua taunted; his eyes on Harry who stood before Draco and Celeste. "I wouldn't have expected anything else from the cowardly bunch of snakes."

"Yes, and Gryffindors are just so courageous and righteous are they not?" Harry replied, with a cool smile in place.

He was all too aware of the fact that his aura was flaring out in angry waves which was the only sign of his anger. He watched with satisfaction as Joshua seemed to be tense for the first time, his

wand held tightly in his hands as his eyes drilled to Harry, before he smiled lightly.

"You have power," Joshua said loudly and clearly, addressing everyone. "And it will be your benefit if you do not taint your power and associate yourself with such filth. We appreciate power, Gryffindors appreciate power and Dumbledore appreciates power. You may join us," he held out his hand for a handshake. "We remember the sorting. Perhaps you might have some misjudgement about the Gryffindor House which is why you protested against being sorted there, but I am willing to show you otherwise."

Harry sneered mentally. Too late – he was taken and his loyalty elsewhere. The Gryffindors and Dumbledore appreciated power then? It was too bad that Dumbledore didn't realise about Harry Potter's exceptional 'power' before he proclaimed Joshua as the Chosen One. Things could have turned out very differently.

Harry looked at the outstretched hand and back to Joshua's overly confident smile on his tanned face.

He held up his hand and Joshua raised his in welcome but –

He proceeded to brush the strand of wayward hair out of his vision casually.

Gasps echoed from the Gryffindors and Joshua's eyes hardened before he dropped his hand slowly, never taking his eyes off Harry. His lips curled as he tilted his head up slightly, seeming to nod coldly at the prospect of having been denied.

The Chosen One wasn't a person that was used to being denied of what they wanted.

"I'm afraid that I have to decline your offer," Harry said with a small smile and Joshua raised his eyebrow threateningly as an invitation to continue. The Gryffindors frowned, looking at him intently, "You see," he continued, his voice hard with barely suppressed anger, "I do not usually follow people with no exceptional power. Like yourself, for example."

His voice was bloody polite?

Joshua's eyes widened in indigence and the Gryffindors burst into wild protests and arguments that their Chosen One was exceptionally powerful. The Slytherins on the other hand, remained silent though the smugness radiated off them as they stared at the overly agitated Gryffindors. Celeste smirked, her face haughty as she regarded Granger who flinched slightly at the unwaveringly hard gaze before Celeste turned away in disinterest.

"You seem to be unaware, having come from another country," Joshua said slowly, his voice slightly trembling in his anger, "that I am the Chosen One – the one prophesized to defeat You-Know-Who. I have power – exceptional power, way beyond the dreams of anyone our age."

Joshua's shoulders squared importantly at the proclamation and Harry's eyes narrowed. The 'Chosen One' card again – time doesn't change a thing, Harry realised disgustedly. His brother still thought that being the Chosen One meant that he was powerful – his mentality since young, fed by the lies and manipulation of Dumbledore. As if being the 'Chosen One' meant that he had exceptional power to conquer the world and that everyone had to listen to him. As if.

Harry slowly surveyed his brother before him before his eyes widened slightly as though he suddenly realised that Joshua was very powerful and he regretted his attitude towards the Chosen One. Joshua looked triumphant as he glared at Draco winningly. That look turned into puzzlement when Harry's smile became a full blown smirk.

"Ah," Harry said, his voice alive with mirth as he said loudly, "But I am not You-Know-Who. I am Harrison Riddle. You are not prophesized to defeat me."

The Slytherins couldn't contain their snorts and they burst into laughter at Joshua's expression. His brother was seemingly frozen as he glared at Harry, turning red in embarrassment and anger. A stunned silence before Harry continued innocently, "Which is why, I simply cannot understand why you are telling me about you being prophesized."

Joshua trembled in rage. "Dumbledore will hear of this!" he shrieked furiously, before bursting out, "And you will regret this! You will

regret your attitude towards me, you watch out! Filthy Slytherins, I am not someone you can mess with! You will regret your actions! Just you watch out! You think that because you have a bit of power and that you are from Durmstrang gives you the right to insult me? I the Chosen One? Dumbledore will hear about this and you'll be back in Durmstrang in a second! Clearly, you don't know how things work here at Hogwarts!" Joshua abandoned his calm as he screeched at Harry wildly, attempting to lunge towards him but was restrained by his team members.

Harry merely sneered over the tumult, his eyes hard. "I'm sorry for not respecting someone who relies on Dumbledore in times of need."

He raised his shields as two jets of crimson light rushed towards him while his brother continued his incoherent shrieks of protests. The Gryffindors looked enraged themselves and glared at him, in between restraining their leader.

"Fighting now, dearest Chosen One?" Harry could not help taunting his brother. Oh, revenge tasted so sweet, now that he could stand up to his brother and jeer at his childishness, no longer the meek boy forever hiding under his brother's shadows, afraid to utter an opinion without being asked to, afraid that his brother would reject and ignore him and jealous that his brother was the Chosen One and not him. That terrified and cowering weak Harry Potter was long dead, replaced by Harrison Riddle – a wizard full of confidence, power and cunningness. The change was chilling – yet exhilarating all the same.

Harry felt like a fallen angel – Lucifer perhaps.

"Tell me, would Dumbledore want that? Or is your behaviour merely mirroring that of your mentors? Behind the twinkling eyes, is this Dumbledore's true form? A raging maniac whenever he loses his control?" he spat.

Joshua looked mad with rage but it seemed to fuel Harry further and he lost control of his temper and the words came spilling out from him. His usual calm demeanour forgotten as he taunted Joshua like there was no tomorrow. He was shaking in anger now before he breathed slowly, calming himself. His chance had finally arrived – to show Joshua that he was not the weak, submissive brother they

thought he would grow up to be. And he could finally teach Joshua a lesson, to shout at him that the world – contrary to his and the world's popular belief – did not revolve around him.

"You cannot even defeat me, how would you defeat Lord Voldemort?" Gasps echoed when he said his father's name. The Gryffindors stared up at him – their expressions of shock, horror, admiration, fear and defiance.

Harry sneered at Joshua, his aura smothering him in angry, turbulent and threatening waves. "And you shudder at his name, don't you, Potter? Are you afraid of his name? Are you really the prophesized one? Are you not a hoax? Perhaps you are, we don't know," he smiled cunningly as he said slowly, "All we have is Dumbledore's words."

The Slytherins murmured in agreement and he continued, smiling as he did so, "You had a brother did you not? Perhaps the prophecy meant him, not you."

There was a pregnant pause while his words were registered.

Then whispers ran through the crowd and Joshua looked outraged at the mention of his long-gone brother who he knew was much more powerful than he was. He was far too enraged to speak. It had been a long time since anyone talked to him this way, in this manner. How dare they – he was the Chosen One, worshipped by the world. He could not stand for this, and to have the possibility that his brother being the Chosen One so sharply thrown into his face was madness.

"My brother was weak, and a near squib," Joshua shouted, his words faltering slightly in his lie, but he ploughed on, waving his fist, his voice rising more confidently. "He ran away when he was young, too afraid of the war. He never had an ounce of courage – he was nothing. He could never be the Chosen One! It is me, never him! It could never be!"

Harry's cold eyes locked with Joshua's and a tinge of emerald burst into view for a fraction of a second before Harry quickly enforced his glamour. Inside, he was roaring with anger. How dare his brother put him down this way? How dare he insult him in this horrid manner? Why he was much, much, more than Joshua could ever be –

"Why does it matter to you?" Joshua sneered, between struggling against his team mates and shouting hex after hex at him, all of which he blocked or rolled out of the way.

Harry paused, wrenching himself from his thoughts, before he shrugged. "Oh I don't know," he mocked, his eyes cruel. "Perhaps I just love to do what others don't. I don't worship blindly – I'm practical and I'm just pointing out the obvious flaw in your Chosen One's status."

Another jet of light rushed towards him and he side stepped it.

"You – how – dare you doubt me?"

Harry sneered at his brother, his normally dim and glamour hazel eyes alight with vengeance.

"That's enough!"

Heads turned towards Granger who stepped forward bravely as she faced Harry straight in the eye, her determination fierce on her face. She was trembling slightly, but her head was held high.

Mudblood, Harry sneered as his lips curled.

The Gryffindors's hold on his struggling brother slackened as they turned towards their house mate in surprise. Harry was mildly surprised that it took Granger such a long time to cut into their quarrel –she couldn't keep her mouth quiet and loved to act as though she was a walking encyclopaedia – a know it all.

"We had Dumbledore's word for this, Riddle," Granger said shortly, with another glance at Joshua who finally cooled down slightly, though his eyes were still narrowed with anger. "And Dumbledore's word is all that matters so if you have nothing better than to create trouble here, I suggest that you find time to do something constructive like –" She paused when he locked her eyes within hers.

"Has it ever occurred to you that Dumbledore might be mistaken?"

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13. Room of Requirement

Granger spluttered as her sentence was interrupted. Looking furious, she opened her mouth to argue when she suddenly paused in mid word and frowned unattractively.

"Dumbledore's always right! He is the greatest wizard of all times!"

Harry turned towards the voice and was not at all surprised to realise that it came from the revived Weasley who was waving his fist at Harry in spluttering rage.

Harry barely refrained from cursing the red head into oblivion. The Gryffindors were all so warped around Dumbledore's little finger that they didn't even bother to question about Dumbledore's loyalty to them and the extent of his powers. They were manipulated and used and they didn't even realise it, only believing that Dumbledore was always right and if Dumbledore says so, then it must be true. Just like how it was with the prophecy – they blindly followed and trusted Dumbledore's words without a question.

Like Dumbledore knew everything.

Fools.

"Even the greatest wizard of all times can make a mistake, Weasley. Or are you so bold and arrogant to claim that Dumbledore has never made a mistake?"

Silence met his words. Some of the Gryffindors had the decency to look ashamed as they stared down at their feet nervously while his brother merely glared at him hatefully.

Harry didn't need to use Legilimency to know what his brother was thinking.

"Consider my words. Have any of you ever questioned Dumbledore's doing? Have you ever, for an instance, wondered why

Dumbledore makes certain decisions? You are manipulated by him – so far are you that you fail to consider his statements. You believe in him blindly. You believe that his word is law, but Dumbledore can be wrong."

Silence fell among the Gryffindors, save for the incoherent splutterings of Weasley.

"Harry!" a voice hissed to his right and someone tugged his arm.

He turned to face the wide eyes of Draco and Celeste staring at him through the crowd of Slytherins, both of whom were looking at him as though they had never seen him before. He relaxed slightly as he caught sight of his friends and tightly squeezed his eyes shut, trying to rein in his temper.

What was wrong with him today? He thought with startling horriification as he immediately recalled the words he had said in the past minutes.

Strangely enough, he didn't feel as though he regretted it. It felt as though he had downed an entire bottle of Felix Felicis and satisfaction enveloped him reassuringly as though he could do no wrong. A wild triumph lit his heart like a blazing fire as he stood his ground.

"What are you doing?" Draco hissed. "The Quidditch Pitch, remember? Why are you so worked up over – over him? Over Potter?" Draco's eyes flickered to Joshua in disgust, before they fell on him.

Celeste looked at him in suspicious eyes in between her concerned stares and he shook his head quickly, trying to clear his thoughts.

"Sorry, I – er – I forgot myself," Harry said quietly. "I don't know what came over me just now... I was just so enraged that he uses his Chosen One's status..."

Merlin, what was with him today? He was blabbering like a bloody whining school girl.

Celeste looked at him in distrust, concern, worry and doubt and he insisted, "Really, I'm fine... I... just couldn't stand that he is the

prophesized killer of ... the Dark Lord," he lied. "You know..." he hinted slightly.

Draco made a disbelieving noise while Celeste seemed to be taken in by his excuse which he justified to himself was partially true, but most of his anger came from his brother and his belief that everyone would be enamoured by him and would willingly follow him and Dumbledore's cause. It disgusted him to no end to find out that his brother used his Chosen One's status whenever he talked to the Slytherins like it was a trump card and that everyone should bow down to him.

"Let's go, continue with Quidditch," Harry said to Draco who nodded tensely, his eyes still suspicious but he led his team away, round the Gryffindors who stared at them wide-eyed, but made no move to stop them.

"Did you hear us? We booked the pitch!" Joshua said incredulously, his voice still shaking in anger as the Slytherins sidestepped him. "Did you not hear us?"

Harry was about to ignore Joshua when a familiar voice interrupted smoothly. "Don't mind Riddle, he has never set much in store for rules."

Heads turned to the voice and Harry watched coldly as Drayvers stepped out from behind the Slytherins in a swagger, striding over to beside Joshua with the rest of the Slytherin Durmstrang students except Celeste, all of whom stood behind him as they followed their leader. Drayvers stood with the Gryffindors, facing the Slytherins.

Joshua gave Drayvers an appraising glance before he turned up his nose. "And who might you be?" he said, the cold anger visible in his irritation.

"Issac Drayvers – Heir to the Drayvers family," Drayvers introduced and he relaxed into a forced smile, holding out his hand. "Riddle and I – you should know that I have never approved of his...manners and attitude even at Durmstrang." His eyes surveyed Harry who stiffened. "Pity," he drawled, "the Professor favours him."

Joshua nodded in realisation as he shook Drayvers's hand. "It's nice to know that someone in Durmstrang and Slytherin have backbone

to stand up to Malfoy and Riddle. They cower beneath him because he is the Malfoy Heir," Joshua said loudly.

"And the Gryffindors respect you because you are the supposed Chosen One," Celeste retorted. Joshua turned towards her and Celeste strode forward towards Joshua so that they were eye to eye. Her eyes scanned him before she turned away – bored.

"Celestine Travers," Celeste introduced, her eyes flickering towards Isaac in cold anger. Isaac stiffened at her harsh gaze. "And it will do you good to remember. Isaac might have joined your little group but you can be assured that the rest of us are not fooled by your supposed Saviour identity. We respect power, not status. Clearly of which, you do not have."

Joshua looked as though he would argue when Drayvers whispered in his ear insistently and Joshua straightened up and looked grudging as he turned to Celeste with another side glance at Isaac and took a step forward.

Celeste did not back off.

"Perhaps a proper introduction is prudent. Isaac here tells me that you are different from Malfoy and Riddle," Joshua said, holding out his hand. "I am, as you might have known, Joshua Pott-"

Celeste turned from him and to Drayvers. "I do not need you to tell Potter anything about me, Drayvers," she said coldly to Drayvers. "And Potter, I didn't ask for your name because it would make no difference."

The tension was thick in the air.

Draco cleared his throat loudly. "Right, so Drayvers, you are welcomed to spend your days with the Gryffindors. I'm sure they will not mind giving you a tour. In the mean while," he snapped his fingers to the Slytherins. "Please excuse us – we have a game to get to."

And they walked past the angry Gryffindors without much of a backward glance. Joshua was positively seething in anger and it fuelled Harry's happiness. His happiness was built on his brother's misery then? Harry thought wryly, his anger evaporating slightly.

But it had not been a wasted trip – some of the Gryffindors seemed slightly convinced and suspicious of Dumbledore after his declaration. He briefly wondered why no one suspected of Dumbledore's ideals and bothered to question about his words and decisions but he could probably relate why.

If he hadn't been staying with the Dark Lord, he probably would never see past Dumbledore's manipulations either. Granted, he always questioned himself when he was young why Joshua was the prophesized child just because Dumbledore said so but when Lily told him to drop it and that Dumbledore's word was final, he did – for a period of time. He now realised that they were like obedient little pets – pawns – which Dumbledore was playing with, never bothering or suspecting enough to question his motives. So trusting, like a typical Gryffindor.

And Harry could have been one of them, he realised with a sickened jolt as he walked across the Quidditch grounds. He might have laid his life down for his brother's if Lily told him to when he was young. If he was convinced that it was for the 'greater good' and it would benefit the Wizarding world, he might have.

He shuddered slightly at that chilling thought when Celeste's beaming voice broke into his thoughts.

"Who would have thought that Drayvers would end up ganging with Potter? And your words were well placed," Celeste said. "You might have convinced me about Dumbledore if I hadn't already known. Some of the Gryffindors even looked convinced by you."

Harry shrugged and made a non-committal noise. "No one ever made them see past what they could see. In their eyes, Dumbledore is like a God, someone who is never ever wrong. They don't ever question Dumbledore's actions. Only the Ministry does and the world thinks of them incompetent."

Celeste stared at him, wide eyed for a moment before she shifted slightly.

"What?" he demanded, defensively.

"Nothing much, just wondering."

"Something's up, so spit it out."

Celeste sighed and took her time to reply. "You know..." she said slowly. "Your words, the way you said about Dumbledore just now... you sounded like the Dark Lord himself... the way he persuades and gathers his followers against Dumbledore. It's kind of disconcerting to remember that you will follow in his footsteps."

His reply was a muted "Oh" before he collected himself and gave a grin. "It runs in the veins, remember?" he tapped his wrist with a smile.

"Like you haven't used that one on me whenever I say that you resemble the Lord," Celeste retorted. The two of them were lingering at the back of the group while Draco gathered his team members and mounted their brooms.

"You're just jealous," Harry teased.

Celeste huffed slightly. "In your wildest dream," she replied airily. "I don't plan on becoming Dark Lord Junior as my career."

Harry turned to watch the Quidditch training and felt his thoughts begin to wander off.

"So much would happen this year," Celeste commented after a long silence. "The mission... we should take a look at the Vanishing Cabinet later this week. After Quidditch... you know."

Celeste's words hung in the air while Harry considered. It was probably time that they made their way to the Vanishing Cabinet...

X

"You sure, it's here?" Celeste whispered softly. "I mean... it doesn't look quite like it."

Draco looked around at her and pointed towards the wall. "I tried it before – it works. A weird place to have a room, but... it's magical. All you have to do, is walk along this wall three times, and concentrate hard on finding the vanishing cabinet."

Harry strode forward, placing his palm on the mundanely blank stretch of wall and closed his eyes. Almost at once, a surge of power flowed through him, seeming to hum and throb under his palm before filling him up – almost as if filling up his magical core, giving him an intoxicating feeling. A minute passed and he slowly removed his hand, still feeling the exhilarating power within those walls.

He was almost awestruck at the hidden power and magic within the ancient castle.

He turned back to Celeste and Draco, who were both looking at him questioningly.

"It's here," he said quietly, his head slightly giddy from the power he felt just seconds before. "I can feel the power – the room has an ancient power, it was probably built to be unplottable and hidden. The room was probably meant to be a secret, only for those who stumble across it if not the entire Hogwarts population would be queuing up to enter the room. It's sort of a sanctuary, I guess, to those who manage to find this mystical room."

Celeste gave a non committal noise as she walked towards him, before placing her palm on the wall carefully, like he did before. She closed her eyes for a moment before she removed her hand and stood backwards, her eyes on the wall.

"I think I get what you mean," she conceded at last.

Draco gave a relief sigh.

"So – let's try it then," Harry suggested and they nodded.

They faced the wall and Harry glanced at Celeste and Draco, both who nodded back at him. They walked back, once... twice... thinking hard about finding the Vanishing Cabinet, trying to banish all other thoughts away from their mind... just concentrating on the cabinet. Harry was finding it particularly difficult – he was still seething over his encounter with his brother yesterday, and it felt as though he was hallucinating... he could hear his brother's familiar voice... he was dreaming... he knew he was... he was walking back on the wall and he flung his eyes open to meet calculative brown eyes.

He halted in mid track.

"Wait," he said quickly to Draco and Celeste, who were a few steps ahead of him, both of them nearing the end of the third time walking past the wall.

Draco spun around, and his steel grey eyes locked with his before they widened slightly at the sight of the intruders.

"Potter?" Draco said in surprise as his gaze fell to Joshua Potter, who stood near Harry, his arms folded, his eyes narrowed. Beside Joshua were Granger and Weasley, both of whom had their eyes fixed at Harry and wands out warily.

"Come to join the fun?" Draco asked in disbelief and exasperation.

They were so close to seeing the Vanishing Cabinet for the first time, only to be foiled by his brother and his Golden Trio. Harry cursed mentally – his brother was definitely hot on their trails now and with his magical map of Hogwarts, he would know where they were, what they were doing constantly. He would have to find a time to destroy the map – or wipe their names of it. The map might portray him as Harrison Riddle since Harry Potter ceased to exist those years ago, but he didn't feel comfortable with his brother watching his every move.

Joshua took a step forward. "We know you're up to something bad, Malfoy. And we are here to stop you – whatever you are about to do. Slytherins are never up to any good." His voice rose proudly as the old prejudice leaked into his voice.

Celeste snorted and eyes fell to her. "You do realise, that you are being very judgemental?" she asked, her eyebrows arched. She unfolded her arms and stood beside Harry. "You are judging us by the stereotype Slytherins. To you, all Slytherins are cunning and practice Dark Arts. But you might be wrong – there are witches and wizards sorted to Slytherin because of their ambition. Does ambition equal to Dark and evil? No – being the Minister of Magic can mean ambition, saving the world can mean ambition. Being the Chosen One is also an ambition." Celeste paused here and Granger quickly interrupted –

"It doesn't change the fact that most Slytherins are You-Know-Who's followers," Granger said, her eyebrows contracting as the know-it-all look was on her face again as she ploughed on eagerly. "In fact, it is the Slytherins who are supporting You-Know-Who. According to 'Rise and Fall of Dark Wizards' Slytherins make up the majority of Dark Wizards, with a total percentage of eighty two and a –"

"I did not ask for your opinion, Granger," Celeste cut in, her voice irritated at Granger. Draco smirked and Harry looked faintly amused at Celeste putting down the know-it-all a peg or two. Granger was getting on his nerves, with all her narrow-minded judging. He knew for a fact that she wanted to get into Gryffindor because Dumbledore was in Gryffindor – she blindly followed Dumbledore like a mindless puppet and tried to make others see her warped way. "So please, do not interrupt. And they say that mudbloods can fit in with the society – yet your manners clearly prove otherwise."

Granger's eyes widened in disbelief. "Excuse me?" she said, her voice high as she spun around towards Joshua for backing. His brother immediately opened his mouth, but Celeste continued quickly.

"Your assumptions are what I have been saying. You view Slytherins as You-Know-Who's followers. Yet you forget that dark wizards come from all houses and not just Slytherins. Do you dare say that Hufflepuff has never produced a single dark witch or wizard? Or Ravenclaw or Gryffindor for that matter?"

"Slytherin has the most number of dark wizards!" Weasley burst out, pointing his finger accusingly at Draco. "He is the proof! He and his slimy git of a father have been You-Know-Who's followers for a long time."

"I would appreciate it Weasley, if you do not make assumptions," Draco drawled. "And as much as I would like to continue with this discussion, we have better things to do."

"Up to something again, I surmised as much," Joshua said quickly, his eyes calculative as it fell upon Harry before turning away. "We're not leaving until you leave."

"That would be your problem," Harry said smoothly. "For we do not wish to linger in your... presence for a second later, and we would make a move first. If you would excuse us?"

Without waiting for a reply, Harry spun on his heels and strode down the long corridor, seething in anger and irritation. His brother was annoying – he growled mentally. He was vaguely aware of Celeste and Draco hurrying behind him and he slowed down slightly as he turned right from the corridor before halting to a stop. He bent his head against the wall, before thumping his fist against it in annoyance.

The cool cement wall seemed to clear his thoughts slightly as he breathed in deeply, his eyes tightly squeezed shut. His brother still managed to get on his nerves – he had not managed to keep his cool. That would have to be remedied immediately, he needed to grasp his Occulmency shields and block himself of all emotions... he could not disappoint his father.

"Harry...?" Celeste's voice came hesitantly, from far away.

Harry sighed softly before he tilted his head upwards from the wall and turned to his left and found himself face to face with Celeste and Draco who were looking at him in worry and concern.

"Is something wrong, Harry?" Celeste voice came slowly. When he did not reply, she continued, "You seem... to bear a grudge against Potter. It's ... scary to see you acting this way, so enraged, irritated and annoyed, displaying your emotions to everyone when you are usually so cut off and enclosed from the world."

Harry sighed and turned away, finding himself unable to meet the concerned stares of his friends eyes. They trusted him to believe him so much, but he had yet to tell them his greatest secret...that he was Joshua Potter's long lost brother, that he was Harry James Potter – supposed member of the Light side who ran away.

He would have to tell them eventually; he did not like hiding things from the one of the few people on Earth who he trusted. Of course, he remembered abruptly, that his father would surely oppose, and he would not go against his father's wishes, but he would make Voldemort see his reason – to gain his friends trust.

He didn't think that his identity could hold out much longer. Dumbledore was suspicious of him from the beginning – his powerful – and repressed – aura, his name – the same name as the Dark Lord, Tom Riddle, and the fact that he seemed to carry a mysterious air around him. Secrets and lies was how he lived and he wouldn't change it. He couldn't bring himself to after all, his father was the epitome of secrets and manipulations and he grew with him...

"I – I can't tell – I mean, you'll know, eventually... Just give it a rest first, I can't say, not now, maybe next time, in future... No, I meant..." he was blabbering and he couldn't help it... he didn't think he knew what he was thinking.

Celeste placed a hand on his shoulder and shook him lightly. He tilted his head upwards and brushed away the strands of hair obscuring his vision to stare into the determined eyes of Celeste and Draco before he faltered slightly.

"It's complicated," he hedged out and pointedly looked around the corridor he was in. The corridor was hardly the place for a proper conversation after all. "You will know soon, but Potter... we have a history," he admitted reluctantly.

Draco's eyes widened by a fraction and a bewildered expression settled across his face. "Potter?" Draco repeated. "A history? But why would you know Potter? He is the Gryffindor Golden Boy, Dumbledore's favourite and you are the Dark Heir," Draco whispered. He turned to Celeste, as though hoping Celeste would explain. "Have you met before?"

Draco's voice had risen considerably and Harry hastened to quieten the Malfoy Heir. Celeste fixed her eyes on him and he felt the silence grow uncomfortable and backed a few steps. What was he supposed to say? 'Sorry, but I was Harry Potter who ran away to the Dark Lord and was adopted as the Dark Heir?' Even in his head, the words sounded unbelievable, like it was from a soap opera.

His life was full of dramas – he admitted it.

"We've met, but he probably doesn't remember me," he said briefly, hoping that Draco would give it a rest. His words were a complete lie of course – but Draco need not know about that fact.

"Then why –?"

"Just give it a rest, Draco. You will know in future... I can't tell you now," he interrupted. "Come on, we better get back to the Vanishing Cabinet, Potter would have gone by now."

"But Harry!" Draco protested, swinging round to Celeste, demanding her to intervene.

"Leave it, Draco," Celeste said, with her eyes on Harry in concern before turning back to Draco. "If Harry wants to tell us, he would. And he will, eventually like he said."

"But that could be ages!"

"Yes," Celeste agreed. "But now is hardly the best time – in a corridor where anyone can overhear. I suggest we get back to the Slytherin common room and try enter the room later. That's the only thing we can and should be doing now."

Harry was grateful for Celeste's interruption but felt a slight guilt at Draco's hurt expression and grudgingly explained, "Draco, it's not that I don't want to say, but Potter and I – it's complicated and it would take me a long time to get the whole truth out. And yes, father does know about it, but he disagrees that I should tell anyone. You know what father is like..."

"But you'll tell us right?" Draco asked hopefully. "We're your best friends."

"That's what I said," Harry replied, feeling marginally relieved that the topic was over though the pressure of his identity loomed over him.

What he wouldn't give...

"Come on, let's go back before someone else finds us lingering around the corridors," Celeste said as she pulled them away from the corridor.

Harry sighed as he followed her, but he realised with a sinking feeling that he would have to confess in time and hoped that Draco would not view him too badly. The Potters and the Malfoys never got

along well but... he could be the first person to change that historical fact.

For the umpteenth time, Harry vaguely wondered why he couldn't be Voldemort's biological son, but then he remembered that his father would never consider that and imagined his father accompanied by a morose looking witch. Then the image blurred and changed into a cackling Bellatrix.

Harry snorted.

X

Harry did not get an opportunity to visit the Room of Requirement ever since that day. For the next three days, he was kept busy with the classes at Hogwarts. He had endured Transfiguration, Defence against the Dark Arts, Herbology and all the other classes that Hogwarts offered. The syllabus was nothing that he hadn't come across in Durmstrang or the Riddle Library, and he amused himself by seeing the Hogwarts students struggle through the classes although his polite and helpful smile was in place.

To the teachers, he was the perfect student, brilliant and modest; always ready to help his classmates.

To his classmates, he was the perfect friend, always so willing to teach them, guide them...

To the Gryffindor Golden Trio, he was a show-off, pretending to be the perfect teacher's pet.

Today he was due to start Charms after the lunch break. Seeing Lily Potter in the same class, teaching him... he didn't want to think about it, the very thought itself shook him a little. His mother, he would be facing her directly, though the added bonus of her expression if she ever knew that the Dark Heir was her birthed son was one to remember...

But before that, he would be giving the Room of Requirement another try and it excited him slightly to be able to see and feel the cabinet for himself. He was still seething over the previous botched encounter because of his brother, but no matter, the plans revolving around the Maruder's map was undergoing.

He waited patiently at a secluded corridor for Celeste and Draco to emerge from their lessons before they went to the room. A few minutes passed before the two of them hurried forward quickly, their bags slung over their shoulders as they pulled him into a corner.

"Ready?" Celeste asked breathlessly.

He nodded and they found themselves looking at the room two minutes later without a hitch thankfully. He repeated the same procedure, closing his eyes shut as he forced himself to think of the room and paced forward and back three times, his heart hammering in his chest. At the third time, he heard a slight grinding noise and turned sharply towards the wall – only that the wall was not a blank stretch anymore but a large beaten-looking door stood proudly within it.

"Inside, quick!" Celeste hissed as she pushed the door open cautiously, unconsciously shoving Draco into the room and he glowered at her.

Harry peered at the room in interest as he surveyed it. The room was not large, but brightly lit and lamps hung on the walls at odd intervals. There was a table at the side of the room, with chairs around it.

But that was not what caught his attention. His breath hitched as he walked forward silently, towards the Vanishing Cabinet that loomed high over his head, looking tall and formidable. It looked antique and Harry didn't doubt that it wasn't and he could feel a strange hollow yet broken rhythm within it.

"Blimey – is this it? It looks different!" Draco's voice echoed excitedly from somewhere behind him.

"Different?"

"It was like a junk house the previous time I came in. There were mountains of things – and even a half eaten Licorice Wand! But this... this room's amazing!"

"You said," Celeste replied as she reached one hand cautiously towards the Cabinet and her eyes widened as her fingers came into contact with it.

"Merlin ... Harry, this cabinet is real." Her eyes were sparked in wonder, her attention wholly devoted to the cabinet. "It's definitely the real thing. Only it will be able to have the power...fake magical artefacts wouldn't."

"We've pointed that out," Draco reminded pointedly.

His eyes were fixed at the cabinet, and his brows were creased in worry, his shoulders tensing. Draco circled the cabinet, his wand outstretched as he jabbed the cabinet every few seconds, before his eyes turned back to Harry.

"Well...? Should you – I mean do you want to ... go first?" he suggested tentatively.

Harry surveyed his friend for a second before he nodded tersely. He took a deep breath before he quickly chanted an incantation which he had learned just the year before in a Dark Arts book. The spell was highly dangerous and could only be performed by a skilled witch or wizard, but he doubted that the cabinet could be fixed by a spell other than something complex.

"Es-le fisico..." his voice trailed off and he ended the spell, waiting silently, his breath sucked in.

The cabinet seemed to glow for a moment in large eerie blue before the light dissolved slowly, revealing the cabinet in all its majestic glory. A second passed before Draco exhaled loudly and strode forward, his steps bouncing as he hesitantly reached for the cabinet door.

And he flung it open.

"I don't believe it," Draco whispered hoarsely after a second passed. The interior of the cabinet was still in shambles. It looked a shade better than it was before Harry's incantation – yet the improvement was barely, unnoticeable if he had not looked carefully all those time.

Celeste blinked slowly, her hand reaching out towards the cabinet, before feeling it gingerly. "Harry..." she said, her back facing him. "Are you sure...?"

Harry did not reply. He was in a state of shock himself, his brain stunned. Was it possible...? How could it be? The spell he had just tried was highly advanced and he had been so sure that it was the key to fixing the cabinet. This was the very same spell his father used that fixed several magical artefacts that he had collected throughout his childhood...

For a second, he thought that he was dreaming. That spell... it was supposed to work, and yet, it was as though a slap was thrown right into his face.

"I – I don't know," he stuttered, for the first time in a long time.

He was truly shocked.

Draco spun around to face him. "But – but if you can't – I meant, are you sure that you did it correctly, go on try again!" Draco grabbed him by the shoulders roughly and shoved him to the front of the cabinet.

With a slightly uneasy look, Harry raised his wand. Even as the incantation left his lips and the cabinet turned a blue hue, he was certain that his spell work was perfect...

"Nothing," Draco moaned as he buried his head in his hands after wrenching the cabinet door open to find the interior in the same state as it was before. Only this time, not the tiniest improvement surfaced. The cabinet was empty and as though Harry's spell had missed and never came into contact with it.

Harry turned from the cabinet and crossed the room in a matter of seconds, before he sank into the couches at the side of the room. He stared off into space, not really seeing Celeste and Draco as his brain ran in overdrive.

The seconds passed slowly before, Harry looked up, his eyes slightly unsure.

"I... I think... I can continue on the research but it can't be guaranteed. The spell is supposed to mend everything – every magical artefact. Why it failed, I just cannot comprehend but I'm sure that given more time I would –"

Draco snorted. "Give yourself more time? Like that will work. You said that you could fix the cabinet – and look what's happened now! I thought you knew what to do!"

"I thought I did," Harry said quietly, slowly rising to his feet to meet Draco's furious glare.

"Oh yeah?" the Malfoy Heir retorted. "Well I don't see you trying to fix it. You're just sitting here. But I forgot that your neck isn't on the line and you will not be crucioed if you fail this mission. And who is that unfortunate soul bearing all these? Me!" he spat.

"Is that what you think?" Harry said coolly. Their heated argument were attracting Celeste's attention as she turned towards them, stopping in her incantations. Her wand lowered cautiously as she seemed to hesitate slightly before walking towards them briskly.

"I'll tell you what I think," Draco shouted, clearly agitated by the lack of development. "Just because you are the Dark Heir – I thought you knew how to do it from the confident way you acted in the Riddle Manor. And what did everything turn out to become? Nothing – and I will repeat it again. We have absolutely nothing to follow up on, except your bloody research and every time you research, you coop yourself up in the library for days, even months and by the time you actually do something productive, I would have been in St. Mungo's insanity ward, next to all those people Aunt Bella tortured too, and you," he jabbed Harry's chest angrily. "Will still be at the Riddle Manor with the Dark Lord!"

Was this what Draco thought of him? Harry's eyes narrowed in anger and he trembled slightly in his rage.

But Draco wasn't done with him.

"You may have a extensive list of spells and a great dueller, but when the time comes and your knowledge is needed to put into practical use – you can do nothing. You can barely help us, and I would have thought that you actually knew how to do it. Turns out

that it was all talk, Riddle. The secrets that you've been hiding all these while, do you think I hadn't noticed? We were your friends and all you could do was say, another time!" Draco snarled.

"Too bad that you didn't realise before hand," Harry said in cold anger. His eyes were hard as he stared into Draco's.

"I'll fix this myself! I won't need your help – not now, not ever again!" Draco yelled as he turned and stomped out of the room, the doors banging open as he reached them.

"Draco – no!" Celeste cried out as she hurried after Draco. She paused at the door, one hand still on the door knob. "Harry, he – I will be back, he's just too..." she struggled for a word momentarily.

"Just go," he said wearily and Celeste spun out of the room, chasing after the enraged Draco.

Harry sank back into the chair, a hollow laughter escaping him as it rebounded off the walls. Used – that was what he felt. Just days before he felt as though he had all the things that mattered to him in the world... his father, his aunt Bella, his friends. Yet... the way Draco said it, it was as though their friendship was purely for business, for their own gain.

Was this what Draco regarded their friendship? He thought savagely, anger filling him. Just a mere tool, the Dark Heir with his connections and a wide base of knowledge, spells and curses. A duelling partner, to further train and improve him... for business, was that their friendship?

To think that Harry, he Harry, actually thought otherwise... He was a fool to have not seen it earlier... granted, Draco might have been angry, but those words had to come from somewhere... it might have been the true thoughts that Draco had always felt, spilling out now only when he was so enraged.

Briefly, he considered that Draco might have only said what he did in his panic and anger. If it was Harry's neck on the line, no doubt he would have felt the same. All of Draco's hopes were pinned on him, and to have his hopes drained and so abruptly snatched away... he could only imagine how his friend was feeling.

And Celeste... she was there for him, trying to be the peace maker whenever Draco and he quarrelled. Yet there was a part of him that knew the main cause of their strain was because of all that he was hiding lately. It would have to be remedied, his friends would have to know of his past, but would they turn on him after knowing that he was the long-lost brother of Joshua Potter, Draco's arch enemy?

His father, surely, would object of his decision to tell his friends of his identity, but he didn't think he could continue hiding the truth. Several times over the years, he brushed passed that sticky fact whenever it was brought up, always being too vague over it. He understood Draco's dissatisfaction over his dismissiveness, but it wasn't as though he could just say outright the truth... that he was Harry Potter.

He had been toying with the idea of telling and having his friend know him for who he really was for years but the time was never right. Now, it seemed as though he didn't have a choice. If Draco and Celeste were to despise him for it, then there was nothing he could do. It was fate that made him James Potter and Lily Evan's son and that his brother was the Chosen One and he could not erase the fact that he had spent six years of his life with them.

Or that he once loved his family.

X

He was late, just three minutes late, but too late for him to blend in with the crowd and dissolve within those inexistent shadows like he wanted to, like he originally planned to. He must have been more furious than he thought he was, for he lost track of time fuming in the room of requirement.

Harry hesitated, his hand resting upon the door knob, his breathing calm, yet irregular all the same. He paused, his eyes not seeing anything, not feeling.

One door... all but one door separated him from his mother.

He smoothed his expression into one of an unreadable, stoic mask, yet he could not help that hidden smirk within his features. Let his mother see what he had become, no longer so frightened, and living under the shadows of his brother.

He grasped the door knob firmly and turned, the door swinging open.

The hushed murmurings of the students dimmed as they turned to stare at the latecomer as one.

"So kind of you to join us, Mr Riddle," a loud melodic voice said, in all but sarcasm from the front of the room.

He tilted his head upwards, permitting a casual smirk gracing his features.

And his gaze met with a pair of narrowed emerald green eyes.

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Next Chapter: Harry and Lily interaction & Voldemort finally appears again.

14. Charms With Lily

Harry did not reply, but defiantly kept his gaze on his mother.

The stare-down was broken after a split second, with Lily turning away from him and seeming to refuse to look into his eyes as she stared at the Slytherins, who were eagerly watching her for a reaction.

A moment passed, before Lily spoke. When she did, her voice was frosty and unwelcoming, her eyes steely. "I understand that coming from Durmstrang, you might not be aware of the class rules of Hogwarts, nevertheless, I do not tolerate unpunctuality in my class."

She sniffed slightly, her head turning upwards, lips curling disdainfully as she turned back, her gaze on Harry. If Harry didn't know better, he would have thought that Lily Evans was a pureblood with her demeanour – even if she was lacking the haughty, forbidding grace of the purebloods, she subconsciously mimicked their actions well enough.

The Gryffindors snickered.

Harry did not react outwardly, but seethed on the inside.

"It will be detention the next time, Mr Riddle, regardless of the school you come from," Lily continued icily.

Harry tilted his head upwards at Lily, silently challenging her to continue. Those vivid emerald eyes seemed to intrude into his soul for seconds before they turned away – disinterested. Harry felt a bubbling rage at being dismissed so easily. How could she, he was above her, and he would not –

"Sit," Lily said curtly, gesturing to the last empty seat left in the middle of the classroom.

Harry clenched his eyes shut fiercely for a brief moment before he moved over to the last seat in the class, his expression close off.

Once he was settled down next to a Gryffindor girl with long auburn hair and reverential eyes, Lily continued with her lesson, sitting at the slightly raised platform of the charms classroom. Harry noticed

that her eyes frequently hovered over to where his brother sat near the front row with Weasley, alternating between an expression of pride, recognition and warmth.

"I am Professor Potter as many of you should have known by now," Lily began, introducing herself, for the benefit of the Durmstrang students. "However, due to the Duelling Tournament, my husband will be assisting in the Duelling Club and to save the confusion, you may address me as Professor Evans."

A few Slytherins sneered at her last name and Lily ignored them, showing no reaction apart from her slightly stiffened posture.

"As it is your first lesson with me for this year, as well as the new additions to our class, I have decided to start the lesson a little differently."

Her words captured Harry's attention and a scowl marred his features. He had always hated surprises. It left his preparation to waste.

"Instead of the Caterwauling Charm which we would have been covering, we will be studying the Patronus Charm," Lily said, a wide smile upon her face. Many of the students murmured in interest – the Patronus Charm was said to be highly advanced and could make the caster feel a sense of happiness and warmth if cast correctly, as well as summoning your own personal guardian. This very same charm was only taught towards the end of the NEWT level, and even so, only the theory was emphasized upon, but not the practical.

But Harry could hardly believe his ears. They would be learning the Patronus charm? Of all the advanced charm work he had attempted, the Patronus Charm would be his downfall, seeing that he had no happy memories to speak of. He barely hid his scowl. The very nature of the charm had turned him off, ever since he realised what was required for it to work when he was twelve.

And he would have to conjure the charm today. He tried not to imagine the outcome of his possibly disastrous spell work, cringing at the thought of it, trying futilely to focus on ripping his memories apart in a vain search for a truly happy, ecstatic memory. He would not show his ...weakness. He gritted his teeth in irritation. He could

hardly find any memory that was truly happy and not marred by the stain of Lily or his brother.

"... This charm will allow me to gauge the standards of our new students, and you will find the charm highly useful when encountered with dark wizards..." her eyes flickered over to Harry almost imperceptibly, "and the Dementors of course. A highly useful spell if I know one, and it may save your soul from a hungry Dementor, especially during dark times like this. The Dementors have been said to be out of control, although," Lily pulled herself together to prevent a slip of tongue regarding the origins of that information, "it is only a ... mere speculation. But it will be wise to be guarded against these filthy creatures."

Lily stood up from her seat as she clapped her hands together. "Now, who here can tell me what a Patronus Charm is?"

A few hands shot up into the air, mostly from Gryffindors and one sole Slytherin. Lily paused before she motioned towards Granger who stood up eagerly and recited at top speed, "The Patronus Charm is a charm that conjures a magical guardian over the caster and it will protect one against dark creatures, especially Dementors."

"Ten points to Gryffindor," Lily awarded; a bright smile upon her face. "What Miss Granger has just told us is indeed correct, although many dark wizards find it impossible or difficult to conjure a patronus. A Patronus Charm is strictly and powerfully Light magic and the taint of Dark magic will prevent or be an obstacle towards casting the Patronus Charm and therefore – do you have a question, Miss...?"

Lily halted in mid-sentence as Celeste raised her hand. Her eyes turned towards Celeste at the front of the class as she addressed her.

"Miss Travers," Celeste said; her voice calm and controlled with a tinge of curiosity. Beside her, Draco had his attention fixed firmly at her in interest. "I wanted to ask if we would only be studying Light Charms at Hogwarts."

Lily blinked, her eye brows contracting slightly. She frowned taking in Celeste's Durmstrang uniform and the Slytherin crest upon her robes, and said suspiciously, "And your reason for that query?"

"The Patronus Charm is highly advanced Light magic which several Dark wizards and witches are unable to accomplish and it cannot be improved with further training most of the times. There might be students in the class who have their affinity of magic based on the Dark Magic relatives of theirs have used, and would it not be unfair to students who are learning of a charm they are unable to cast?" Celeste said haughtily. Several Slytherins had their eyes on Celeste now. The Gryffindors scowled and looked at her warily.

"Dark wizards," Lily said softly, dangerously, after a very pregnant pause, "Are not allowed at Hogwarts. We only teach Light wizards."

"I believe you mean that you only teach Light Magic." Harry muttered, warranting a unpleasant look from Lily before she turned to regard Celeste as she spoke.

"But if a witch or a wizard was unable to choose their magic's affinity for Light Magic or the Dark Arts? Heritage does pose as a problem, coming from a dark pureblood family or a light pureblood family," Celeste countered, her hand still in the air.

Lily's smile was still in place, although it had turned sour. "You will find that heritage does not pose as a problem," she said, avoiding Celeste's first question. "I have a friend, who came from one of the darkest pureblood families, whose family have been sorted to Slytherins for centuries, and yet, he broke the tradition and went to Gryffindor instead. Heritage does give certain... advantages over your magic's affinity towards the Dark Arts or Light Magic, but it is not definite. You must have only the will and determination to become a Light witch or wizard and you will become so."

"But wouldn't your friend be facing emotional turmoil, being apart from his family who has been in Slytherin for centuries?" Celeste said. "I too, have a distant cousin, who also comes from a dark pureblood family. He however, broke his family's Slytherin tradition and chose to go to Gryffindor instead. Yet his reason for doing so was not because he had an affinity with Light magic, or that he wanted to be a Light wizard. His sole reason was to prove his mother otherwise, a sort of rebellion, one could say."

Harry knew that both Celeste and Lily were talking about Sirius Black, the disowned Black Heir who rebelled against his family and willingly chose and requested to be sorted into Gryffindor. His exact

reasons were unknown, but Harry always felt Sirius's aura to be tainted with a tinge of Dark magic, rather than unburdened Light magic like the rest of the Order of the Phoenix. Perhaps Celeste was right about Sirius Black. But Sirius was still Joshua's god father and his as well, he remembered, shuddering slightly. Yet Sirius was as bad as Joshua, Dumbledore, the Order and his parents were – their eyes only sought for Joshua, and Joshua alone...

He wondered if Sirius would be worth courting over to the Dark side, but he decided against it almost as one. Sirius had too many roots tied towards Dumbledore and the Order; even if there was the slight chance that the man would choose willingly to join Voldemort, Dumbledore would surely be alerted and put a stop to it.

"I'm afraid this discussion cannot continue, Miss Travers," Lily said icily. "However, if you have any doubts about Light Magic, you may stay after class to continue our debate over a witch or wizard's magic affinity. You are a gifted witch, I'm sure, Miss Travers, so time and essence may be spared in correcting your perceptions of Light Magic and of course the Dark Arts..."

Celeste looked mildly affronted for a moment, before she spoke, slowly and clearly for all to hear. "Professor Evans, are you saying that Light Magic is above, and better than the Dark Arts?"

Lily smiled coldly. "Light Magic is merely a healthier branch of magic than Dark Arts. Dark Arts is destructible and permanent – it is like unleashing an untameable monster within your own mind. The monster will control you, as will the Dark Arts a witch or wizard, to the point that they are so absorbed within the Darkest of the Arts. It is an unhealthy obsession – a dangerous branch of magic which is forbidden to study. Light Magic, on the other hand, produces magic that serves to help the world become a better place, whether for efficiency or convenience and protection against Dark Wizards and Creatures bent on unleashing and practising the Dark Arts."

What – utter – rubbish.

Harry stood up suddenly, his chair scraping against the floor noisily. "And isn't that a form of bias towards Light magic?" he said, fuming.

Lily turned from Celeste towards him, her eyes narrowing at the sight of him once more. He ignored her in favour of addressing the

majority of the class. "A witch or a wizard does not get to choose their Magic's affinity, contrary to what Lily has said. A witch or wizard born with Dark Arts affinity may be able to choose Light Magic over the Dark Arts, but he or she will never perform to their best with Light Magic, for their magical core is tuned towards the Dark Arts. Does Hogwarts ostracise witch and wizards who cannot choose their magical affinity?"

There was absolute silence in the classroom. Harry felt eyes drilling holes into him but it hardly mattered. All that mattered was Lily's perspective of Dark Arts, of Dark Magic... it sickened him. The Dark Arts were not necessarily dangerous. Even Dumbledore had succumbed and practiced Dark magic in his youth and he helped Gellert Grindelwald for Merlin's sake during the first war.

What a hypocrite.

"Fifteen points from Slytherin for speaking out of turn, Mr Riddle. And you will address me as Professor Evans," Lily said quietly, her eyes drilling into Harry's like a burning fire of emerald... "And may I ask about the affinity of your magic, Mr Riddle?" Lily said; her question was sharp and direct, almost as if challenging him to confess.

"It's neither here nor there," Harry said coldly.

The corners of Lily's lips curled. "May I warn you that Dark Magic is forbidden at Hogwarts. Anyone found to be attempting to practice the Dark Arts could be expelled and may find themselves in a cell at Azkaban. I should warn you, Headmaster Dumbledore is strongly against the practice of Dark Magic. Dark Magic is vile and cruel and any sane witch or wizard would rather choose to study Light Magic even if it meant they could not perform their best in it."

"I'm sorry, Professor Evans, but it seems a tiny bit biased coming from the perspective of a Light witch," and a known member of the Order of the Phoenix, Harry added mentally.

Lily smiled coldly. "It does not matter whose perspective it comes from, except that it is a fact."

"If you say so... Professor."

The insides of Harry roared in anger as he forced himself to sit, his body feeling robotic as he clenched his fist tightly together, trying to stop his body from shaking. What he wouldn't have given to shake some sense into his mother... how could a person be so sharp at times and then stubbornly refuse to see facts thrown into their faces? He wouldn't slip no more, he would have to rein in his temper. Challenging Lily like that was... he admitted, irrationally and foolish; a Gryffindor tendency.

He caught the stares of his classmates and of Celeste's face in the midst of the sea of faces. She wore upon her face a concerned glance as she turned back from her seat at the front of the class to face him. He merely shook his head and turned his attention back to Lily who was hovering near his brother, ignoring him completely.

He staunchly refused to look at Draco who hadn't looked at him ever since he came to the classroom, even during his brief spat with Lily.

"Are there any volunteers to demonstrate the charm? Who would like to demonstrate the charm?" Lily asked after a long while, jerking Harry's attention back to the present day.

"No volunteers?" she said again.

Harry smirked inwardly. His mother could hardly demonstrate the charm herself, seeing that her magic was stripped away by Harry, leaving her with average magical powers not nearly powerful enough to conjure a patronus.

"Could you please demonstrate, Professor?" Harry asked in a polite voice. "I'm sure many of us here don't have an inkling what the patronus charm is supposed to be like, the wand movement, and the incantations..." he gave a slightly innocent look and was pleased to note that several of his classmates gave him a grateful smile, especially the Gryffindors. While the Gryffindor Quidditch Team might hate him to the core, the rest of the Gryffindors were charmed by him, and his politeness and eagerness. In the other classes of course; though he would have to work other to persuade them over to the Dark Side... it would all have to be done subtly, and carefully.

He challenged Lily's glare.

"I'll love to do it, Professor Evans," an all too familiar voice interrupted.

Heads turned towards the speaker, who rose from his chair. Harry turned and his eyes met with Joshua Potter, who had a small triumphant smirk etched upon his face as he walked over to his mother.

Lily glanced worriedly at Joshua who reassured her with another smile, and turned to the class. The Gryffindors were staring at Joshua with a mixed expression of pride, expectation and awe.

"The incantation is expecto patronum," Lily said, removing her hand from Joshua's shoulder.

Joshua raised his wand, his eyes narrowed in concentration. Barely aware of doing so, Harry straightened slightly, eager to see his brother's spell work.

"Expecto Patronum!" Joshua bellowed.

A silver wisp of smoke emerged from the tip of Joshua's wand and slowly dissolved in mid-air. The tense atmosphere was also replaced by murmurings when the Gryffindors exhaled as one. The Slytherins looked displeased and Harry was eyeing his brother with a carefully controlled glare.

"Excellent, excellent work, Mr Potter!" Lily cried as she beamed. "50 points to Gryffindor for this excellent demonstration!"

"Fifty?" the Slytherins echoed as the Gryffindors slapped a grinning Joshua on the back as he made his way back to his seat and began chattering excitedly with Weasley who had a reverential look upon his face mixed with envy.

Pity.

"But Professor – he hasn't produced a corporeal patronus!" Celeste said, bewildered. "Awarding the maximum amount of points given at any point of a time is a little too rewarding, isn't it?"

"I will award what I deem fit, Miss Travers," Lily said calmly, over the tumult and protests from the Slytherins. She folded her arms and

stood beside Joshua. "I do not expect students to question my teaching."

Celeste stared at Lily, aghast.

"Now that each and every one of you have seen how the patronus charm works, you may begin with your spell work," Lily said to the class, choosing to ignore Celeste.

Ten minutes into the class, Harry was vaguely aware that only the Gryffindors had managed to produce a wisp of smoke while the Slytherins were failing rather badly. He was not better off himself, even if he did produce a wisp of smoke, but it had faded into the background quickly.

Instead, he amused himself in watching the Gryffindors scrunch their faces up in an attempt to remember a happy memory. The Slytherins were much more reserved, only a small frown upon their usually indiscernible masks as they tried to remember a happy moment. Knowing that the Slytherins consisted of purebloods who never had much freedom, constantly reminding and portraying themselves elegantly, there were hardly times where Slytherins could be free enough to construct a memory of their own, where they were unrestrained by their pureblood etiquette.

A tentative voice caught his attention and he turned, slightly irritated, to his left, only to meet a pair of wide brown eyes from the Gryffindor girl he was sitting with.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" he asked, his voice quiet and polite, showing no hint of his previous irritation.

The girl blushed slightly before she smiled widely. "No, not really," the girl said, her voice high-pitched and eager. "I wanted – wanted to know what Durmstrang was like, you know, I was supposed to be going to Durmstrang but in the end... I well, ended up at Hogwarts," the girl gave a brief laugh.

Harry sighed mentally. He had much better things to do than entertain an excited and curious Gryffindor girl. Up in the front, Celeste overheard their conversation, which was not surprising considering the loud voice of the Gryffindor – and the corners of her mouth twitched as she tried to fight back a knowing smile.

"Durmstrang is magnificent, of course," Harry said, pretending to be slightly affronted and the girl laughed once more. "Our classes are similar, and we do play Quidditch during the weekends. May I ask for your name?"

If possible, the girl blushed even harder. "Sheredele Chard," Sheredele said quickly and launched into a long self introduction which Harry barely registered but tried to appear interested all the same, by nodding along with her speech and lighting up his eyes from time to time as though he was envious and impressed by her stories. Behind these, he was pleased with himself. The Chards were an ancient pureblood family, although not as ancient as the Malfoys nor as renowned and wealthy, but pureblood and rather high up in the Wizengamot all the same. Furthermore, they were a family of Ravenclaws, occasionally, a witch or wizard would end up in Slytherin or Gryffindor. She might be worth courting over to the Dark side.

Might, Harry repeated internally. Only if she stopped her incessant chatters that was slowly irritating every inch of his bone.

"And Beauxbatons is a fascinating school too... I've been begging for Father to let me transfer there with cousin Jereine and my elder sister, but he never agrees..."

Harry nodded, pretending to be sympathetic towards her and the girl simpered.

Just as Sheredele launched into another long explanation on Beauxbatons, Harry caught sight of Lily, who was making her way towards them, her expression peeved and suspicious at the pair of them who had effectively stopped practising the Patronus Charm in favour of their less than entertaining – in Harry's case – conversation.

"Ms Chard," Lily said as she drew level with them. Sheredele gasped as she jumped slightly and turned to face her Professor, before bowing her head slightly.

"Professor Evans – I'm sorry!" the girl exclaimed quickly, looking bashfully apologetic but she gave Harry a wink out of the corner of her eye.

Lily did not respond, but merely turned towards Harry, her gaze disapproving before she drew herself straighter, making her appear taller. It vaguely reminded Harry of the past, when his mother would do that whenever she was angry and about to hand out his punishments...

"Fifteen points," Lily said, and Sheredele tilted her head upwards in horror, her eyes flickering towards the hostile eyes of the Gryffindors. "From Slytherin," Lily finished and Harry's face became blank.

He could hear Sheredele protesting for him, but Lily waved her off as she went to help another pair with their charm work. When she left, Sheredele was apologizing, but Harry merely waved her off, acting as though it was his mistake. She appeared slightly hesitant afterward, but Harry convinced her that it was of no big difference and she returned to her normal chattering stage.

Throughout the lesson, Harry didn't look Professor Evans in the eyes again.

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A week later, Harry exited the Transfiguration room immediately after the class was over and quickly made his way to the Dining Hall for dinner with the Slytherins. He was already late, for Professor McGonagall had requested for him to stay behind in commendation of his marvellous spell work. True, both of them knew that his standards were definitely on par with most of the Professors' skills, and it only made Professor McGonagall keep a tighter rein on him. Harry knew that she was a known member of the Order of the Phoenix through his father and was very conscious of his reply. Professor McGonagall attempted to wheedle information on his family and background out of him. He had very politely spun out a story about his name 'Riddle'. No doubt, Harry mused, Dumbledore had put the Deputy Headmistress up to this.

Yet, despite the passing of an entire week, he still had not patched up with Draco who seemed to favour ignoring him and to Harry, it was completely fine with him for he had better things to concentrate on, such as the first round of the Duelling Tournament commencing tomorrow. He felt slightly bitter and resentful towards Draco, but he quickly ignored those emotions. Granted, the boy might have been

under tremendous pressure by the Dark Lord Voldemort and his life was on the line, yet it did not condone his actions. Harry had a good mind of staying clear of Draco until the Malfoy Heir lowered his pride and apologised.

Celeste, however, was torn between the both of them being stubborn and stalked off, finding company in one Daphne Greengrass, and the two became fast friends. In many ways, Daphne was similar to Celeste, both annoyed by his argument with Draco. Daphne especially, could not stand Pansy Parkinson and Celeste rather agreed with her on that front.

Walking in the corridor, rather than push and jostle with the massive amount of Hogwarts students, Harry cast a disillusionment charm on himself, appearing invisible to the crowd. While it meant that he did get elbowed much more times since he was not physically visible, it ensured that he did not have to maintain his polite smile while making small talk to the curious Hogwarts students as he tried to make his way through to the Great Hall while maintaining his pureblood grace.

Harry scowled. He would not have even stepped into the Great Hall for dinner, but he had to keep up with appearance and grab a bite before heading to the library. In Hogwarts, the Durmstrang students were considered the minority and all eyes were upon them, considering that there was not many of them. While he preferred to blend into the shadows, silently observing each and every students and professors alike, he was thrust into the spotlight.

It seemed as though gossip travelled through Hogwarts in the speed of lightning. His brief Quidditch spat with Joshua Potter, the famous Chosen One was already a juicy piece of news known by the entire school and a favourite topic of gossip amongst the giggling fourth years who looked at him in awe.

Harry didn't know whether to feel mortified or pleased. While he was pleased that it had not turn away potential Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs away from his cause, he did not particularly fancy the way girls trailed after him wherever he went, unlike his brother whose egotistical pride seemed to feed off this attention from the girls. The giggling girls were also one of the main highlights of why Harry chose to stay in the shadows as much as possible, and escaped to a safe sanctuary whenever the opportunity permitted. He

came to Hogwarts with a mission, and it was most definitely not to engage in petty conversation with giggling girls who could not complete a sentence before breaking into loud, high pitched giggles like a pack of hyenas.

It didn't help that the slightly over bearing Celeste wasn't there to help him fan off those giggling girls, who seemed to take advantage of her absence whenever she wasn't around him to surround him. A particular Gryffindor girl – Romilda something – and her posse seemed to be one of the stalkers around him whenever he went. He was so accustomed to turning around and staring straight into her face that he could even remember that particular stalker.

Harry gave a dry laugh.

The students' opinions on the celebrity around the school seemed to be divided equally among Joshua and himself. Joshua had his fame as the Chosen One, and would be – if the day ever came – Saviour of the wizarding world, Hero to the Light. But Harry was quickly gaining his own support and base, not just among the girls.

The purebloods looked to him in a form of respect after seeing Draco Malfoy's eagerness and friendliness towards him. After all, the Malfoys were one of the most respectable families in Britain and throughout the Wizarding World. The Slytherins especially wasted no time in buttering him up and even the Ravenclaws seemed to be driven by his helpful, vast knowledge that drove them closer to him, and eventually, enamoured by the amount of magical theory and practical that he seemed to possess. The Hufflepuffs were flustered by his attention towards them, especially since the Hufflepuffs were not highly looked upon and rarely held the attention of Hogwarts students and visitors alike, and were highly interested by him and constantly strived for his attention. The Gryffindors seemed to deem it as their duty to make the new visitors feel welcome to Hogwarts and Harry used the opportunity to charm many of them towards his side.

It helped that his seemingly friendly, polite yet humorous demeanour drew people to him, like fireflies towards the illuminating light source. People loved to be around him, and he had a vague hunch that it was due to the calming, comforting air that his magic surrounded people with whenever they were near him. He vowed to work even

harder in controlling his annoyance and anger whenever he came close to Lily and the Potters.

It was blatantly obvious to everyone and anyone in the castle – even the Hogwarts ghost whom he caught gossiping and debating over the Quidditch spat – that the fan girls of the Chosen One were slowly decreasing in numbers, the majority of them now choosing to stalk the mysterious Durmstrang boy who would only be there for a year before the Exchange Programme was over. It was like a drug addiction, Harry mused. The more he interacted with them, the more their obsession seemed to heighten, and the more they tried to vie for their attention by doing crazy things that a stalker might do.

He had already received cards proclaiming their idolism towards him, and how they would love to hear more about Durmstrang if given the opportunity. If that was not considered rather extreme towards someone the students barely knew, there were also card invitations for him to visit their houses over the summer.

Needless to say, his brother was feeling more than peeved towards him. From the glory of being the Chosen One, his position was slowly and irrevocably being replaced by Harrison Riddle, just another nobody coming to Hogwarts for the Duelling Tournament. His brother clearly had no tact with people, despite Dumbledore's constant advices for him to be nicer to all his fans, for his brother did not know about rejection. He had seen a poor first year be dismissed rather irritatedly and rudely after daring to ask Joshua for his autograph in the middle of the Great Hall.

The boy later took to stalking Harry instead, and after more digging, Harry found the boy to be one of the more estranged lines of Ceneir – another pureblood family, although not from the main line. The boy seemed eager to be at Harry's beck and call afterwards, and seemed proud to be so, even if Harry had not requested the boy to do anything. The boy would offer him priceless books from his family whenever he spied him studying in the library, and while Harry would look outwardly surprised and flustered by that attention and modest-looking, he was chuckling in pleasure on the inside.

The majority of the Hogwarts population were so easy to manipulate, so easy to trust. Harry finally got a glimpse of how his father had wormed his way out from being another nobody, a 'mudblood'

wizard who somehow gotten into Slytherin into the powerful Dark Lord he was today.

Yet the minority of Hogwarts, consisting mainly of Joshua's loyal friends, the Weasleys, the know-it-all Mudblood seemed to be wary of him whenever he passed with the gang of girls behind him. Each time he passed Joshua and his Golden Trio, they would stop in their tracks and look at him suspiciously, not resuming what they were doing until they confirmed that he was safely gone and out of sight. Other times, they would glare at him, looking as though they were itching to curse him and their self restraint were soon cracking by the subtle remarks Harry said occasionally whenever he passed them.

Several times, the two Weasley twins would attempt to prank, jinx and hex him. There was a variety of jinxes they used, and each time, Harry seemed to deflect or sidestep the hex without trouble. As if it were not enough, the Weasleys had taken to charming the Slytherins' robes bright red and gold, causing an uproar in the Great Hall. All this, Harry knew, was done to get back at him for disgracing the Chosen One.

The whole quarrel with Joshua seemed to be the base and root of Joshua's anger and rivalry towards Harry, but the subsequent many events only heightened that rivalry, leaving Joshua feeling as though he was feeling sour that he was no longer the most revered and idolised student amongst the castle.

Sometimes, Harry thought that life was purely fate. How was it that when they were young, Joshua need not do anything, but everyone surrounding him and Harry would automatically favour Joshua and he would be in the center of the attention, but yet, now it was a reversal of positions. It was now Harry who hadn't needed to do anything and a crowd of people would willingly follow him, it was now Joshua that was working hard and gritting his teeth at the mere thought of being replaced and cast aside.

Of course, if Joshua worked hard enough, and stopped yelling at his fans whenever he was annoyed or stressed, he would have more loyal fans towards him, instead of turning away from him whenever he blew his top, which was quite often, Harry thought dryly, considering his brother's hot headed Gryffindor tendencies and temperament.

Harry could barely withhold a snort at the idea of his brother being charming. His brother was rough, loud mouthed and he could barely contain or hide his emotions for the life of him. James Potter was never a man to hide his emotions or his feelings either, and Lily seemed to be ruled and manipulated by Dumbledore over prejudices towards the Dark Arts, leading to Joshua having a rather vocal opinion on Dark Arts and Voldemort. Only, Joshua hadn't managed to pronounce Lord Voldemort without stuttering or wincing, even if the action was just a tad.

He could tell that this immensely obvious flaw had Dumbledore being immensely unsatisfied and exasperated with the Chosen One even if Dumbledore did not broadcast it to the world, but try as he might, the most Harry heard from Joshua was "Him" and "You-Know-Who" and "Lord V-Voldemort". Harry on the other hand, not willing to attract unwanted attention from Dumbledore for boldly calling his father by Lord Voldemort, chose to skilfully avoid the subject of the Dark Lord whenever it came up. He manipulated the conversation he held with the students of Hogwarts and controlled the flow of the conversation, so such times were unlikely and only reduced to whenever the prophet reported another massive raid by his father and the terror and destruction he left.

Harry remembered one conversation he had with a few Gryffindors.

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It was two days after Harry's first disastrous Charms lesson with Lily and the Daily Prophet had just been delivered news of Voldemort's latest raid at a muggle suburb to the school. Harry, having been assigned to do Defence Against the Dark Arts with the Gryffindor group, including Granger, were settled around a small round table, discussing about the effects of the Dementor's Kiss when the topic of his father's raid cropped up – since the raid involved the many Dementors of Azkaban.

One topic led to another, and Harry had casually asked the Gryffindors what they felt about the Dark Heir.

"The Dark Heir?" repeated a dark haired girl, Patil, looking at him with wide eyes.

Harry smiled and wordlessly invited her to continue.

"Well, not much is known about the Dark Heir," Patil said thoughtfully, her eyes on the Professor who was at another table at the front of the classroom. "But personally, I think he is pretty dangerous and quite high up there in terms of magical capabilities. I wouldn't expect anything less from the heir of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

The girl beside Patil shuddered slightly. "Remember the murder of Amelia Bones? It was scary and it really shook us all," the girl said, her arms wrapped tight around herself. Harry pretended to be confused, seeing that he came from Durmstrang, and the girl hurriedly explained, "Amelia Bones is a very prominent member in the Ministry and with all the wards surrounding her house and the contacts she has in the ministry, it seemed almost impossible that she would have been attacked. But the Dark Heir murdered her successfully, - alone even, from what I have heard – and he got away with it!" her tone was scandalous and furious for the injustice of the murder of Amelia Bones.

Patil nodded vigorously. "The entire of team of aurors didn't even manage to get a sight of him, let alone catch him. It was all done very fast. Madam Bones did not even have a chance against the Dark Heir – she was murdered before she had the chance to raise the alarm, most of us suspect. The Ministry and the Aurors only received word of the attack on her when the wards fell. But even so, the Dark Heir was gone by the time they arrived! And he operated alone, that's what's the fear is all about. Alone, the Dark Heir was able to kill one of the most powerful witches in the Ministry, then what chance would the rest of us stand?" She sighed miserably, her dark hair swinging forth to cover her face.

The boy with long blond hair turned towards him, and added, "I've read about him twice in the news," he whispered, keeping his eyes at the Professor fearfully. Harry's eyes lit up slightly, and acted as though he was genuinely interested in the infamous Dark Heir that apparently had quite a bit of reputation. "See, if you value your life, don't ever mention about the Dark Heir if you see Joshua nearby. He will fly into a rage, and trust me, take my word seriously when I say that you don't want to be around him when he's angry."

"Joshua?" Harry said, pretending to be curiously bewildered.

The boy cast a glance around the room fearfully before dropping his voice and all the occupants around the table shifted slightly closer towards him. "The Dark Heir," the boy whispered, "can steal the magic of a witch or a wizard. He is the reason why Professor Evans, who is Joshua's mother, has lost part of her magic. About ten years ago, the Dark Heir attacked Professor Evans during a raid and stole her magic."

Harry drew back from the crowd, and quickly disguised his smug expression into one of shock and outrage. "But that's not fair!" he exclaimed.

Granger, who had kept surprisingly silent throughout their conversation apart from looking highly disapproving that they had went off topic, interrupted sharply, "Whoever said it was fair?" she said heatedly. All eyes turned towards her and she ploughed on, "The War and You-Know-Who; all the killings of the aurors, none of it is fair. I wish that the Dark Heir would be captured! That would be a huge blow towards You-Know-Who."

The Gryffindors murmured in approval and agreement.

"It isn't easy to catch me, Granger," Harry breathed, too softly for anyone to hear anything, his eyes wild and dangerous.

Granger snapped her eyes towards him and glared. "Was there something you wanted to say?" she said.

He flashed her a smile. "No, nothing, only hoping that the war would be over soon," and that the Dark can crush the Light, Dumbledore and your beloved Chosen One, Harry added mentally.

Granger made a disbelieving noise.

—

Harry was snapped out of his thoughts as he rounded round the corridor into the Great Hall. He quickly removed the disillusion charm and blended in with the crowds easily as he made his way to the Great Hall, where he moved quickly towards the Slytherin table. He spied Draco and Celeste towards the end of the table, which was the only part of the table that had any seats left.

Cursing the Professor for holding him back, Harry fluidly made his way towards them, his expression hostile. It was not the first time that he sat close to Draco, but he had not fancied the feeling of ignoring the angry Malfoy Heir while feeling the stares of the Slytherins upon him. The Slytherins seemed torn about whether to stand up for Malfoy, or for him, seeing that he was quickly gaining influence within Hogwarts and decided to remain silent instead.

Harry slid into the seat gracefully and looked at the food in front of him in mild distaste, but helped himself to some noodles. He was playing with his food, his thoughts wondering off into space. He ignored Draco completely, and Draco him. Celeste looked mildly annoyed by the pair of them and huffed, choosing to talk to Daphne who was eyeing them in curiosity instead. It felt uncomfortable for them to be sitting at the same side of the table, especially without Draco's gang of Slytherins accompanying him and their voices covering up this obvious, tense silence.

However, Harry need not have worried for Draco's gang arrived soon after Harry had started his meal in silence. The entire Slytherin table was filled up with the Slytherins, as the other end of the table hosted some other Ravenclaws who Harry recognised as purebloods.

Crabbe and Goyle made a beeline for Draco, their footsteps echoing loudly as they stomped over. Harry ignored them in favour of sipping his mead.

It was only after a long silence descended upon him did he reluctantly tilt his head upwards, to face the angry faces of Crabbe and Goyle, both of whom were glowering at him. Celeste and Daphne had halted mid-way into their conversation, and their eyes were upon Harry instead.

Harry stared coldly into the eyes of Crabbe and Goyle. There was hardly a need to keep up with pretence within the Slytherin lair.

He broke the silence, slightly irritated. "Is there anything you want?" His voice was clipped, short.

Crabbe guffawed loudly, before turning to Goyle and elbowing him. "Did you hear him? Anything we want?" he turned back to Harry,

seeming to increase in size as he towered over Harry. "Shove off, we are taking this seat," Crabbe raised his hand and attempted to shove Harry from behind him but Harry reacted quickly, drawing his wand and casting a non verbal *protégo*.

"The next time you attack me, I may just retaliate," Harry said coolly.

Crabbe's eyes widened mulishly in anger and he quickly turned to Draco for support, his arms flailing wildly as he motioned towards Harry, but he could not cross the powerful protective barrier.

Harry ignored Draco entirely just as the Malfoy Heir seemed to wave off Crabbe and Goyle to find another seat. After a while, it seemed as though Crabbe and Goyle had gotten irritated and started mocking him.

"Get off these seats Riddle, you scum!" Crabbe said furiously, his face contorting in rage. "You Mudblood – what kind of name is Riddle? It's only because of Malfoy here that we tolerated your overbearing presence and now that you are no longer friends with Malfoy, you are not welcome here!"

"I find it rather lacking to listen to the words of someone who can barely cast a *protégo*," Harry said icily, his expression closed off.

"Mudblood!" Crabbe spat and Goyle nodded vigorously. "You do not deserve these seats! Shove off, you scum, before we make you!"

Harry ignored them completely but Celeste stood up this instant, her palms slamming into the table, causing it to rattle. Daphne looked at Celeste in horror, her jaw dropping at how un-pureblood this action was and Pansy gave a shrill scream as her goblet of mead toppled into her skirt, staining it crimson.

Celeste, however, wasn't aiming for Crabbe and Goyle.

"You!" Celeste said furiously, her voice low but the anger was there all the same. She pointed an accusing finger towards Draco who had remained silent during Crabbe's furious tirade. "I can't believe you would let those two squibs insult Harry this way!"

Draco tilted her head up towards Celeste before turning back down, remaining silent, though he was sending a death glare at his goblet of mead as though it had severely offended him.

"Perhaps it would do you good if you can remember how much help you need from Harry," Celeste continued, but slightly quieter although her voice came out in more forcefully. "And how much you need him to save your sorry arse when the whole thing fails!" she hissed venomously, her whole entire week of irritation with the pair of them seeming to be released in that sentence.

"He has not done anything to help," Draco insisted angrily, turning to face Celeste, before dropping his eyes to Harry who stared back coldly.

Was it a tinge of regret that Harry saw in Draco's eyes before they returned to their normal icy grey?

"And might I remind you," Celeste jabbed Draco's chest harshly, "that if anyone could have a prayer of fixing that horrible cabinet, it would be Harry." Celeste turned towards Crabbe and Goyle now, her expression even more furious than she was when she was fuming at Draco.

"And you two have no right to insult Harry this way. Forgive me when I say that he could easily blast the both of you into the next realm, and you best mind your attitudes!"

Crabbe howled in anger and raised his wand, seeming to attempt to curse Celeste for her insolence but Draco cried out and quickly intervened, his hand seizing Crabbe's wand and tugging it out of Crabbe's stunned hand.

"Malfoy!" Crabbe demanded furiously, his hostile eyes on Celeste who sank back into her seat, her face haughty and unbothered, though looking furious.

"No," Draco growled. "Don't attack – don't attack her."

Harry had enough and all the petty quarrels with Crabbe and Goyle were tiring him out. He stood up from his seat fluidly, ignoring all eyes on him and turned, leaving the Slytherin table, his plate

untouched. He quickly made his way out of the Great Hall gracefully, not turning back when Celeste called him.

All this while, he did not feel anything apart from this cool iciness – not when Draco hadn't stood up for him and watched as his cronies taunted him. He felt a numbing sensation that he found he rather preferred over his heated emotions. There was something wrong with him, and he needed to ask his father now – for the sudden change in him unnerved himself even.

Consequences be damned, he needed to see his father face to face.

Inspiration came swiftly.

The floo network.

But where?

—

Harry walked swiftly towards Professor Snape's office. He knew the man would most likely have a floo network connected to his office – how else would the Professor get to his father's manor when he was summoned?

But en route, he stopped in mid tracks, suddenly realising that barging into Snape's office to use the floo network was most probably not the wisest thing to do. For one, the Professor was sure to have guarded and warded his office with some of the most advance hexes, curses and wards. Harry could take the majority – if not all – of them down, of course, but it would be tedious and he was sure that Professor Snape would be alerted should someone try to take down his wards.

For another, if he was caught... Professor Snape did not know about his status as the Dark Heir, and he did not plan to let the Professor know so early, not when he was still observing the Professor. Admittedly, Professor Snape was a very powerful wizard, probably the most powerful in Hogwarts after Professor Dumbledore. The man was as sly and cunning as another Slytherin and rather favoured torturing students with five feet long essays for detention.

Harry breathed deeply, prepared to turn back to the Slytherin common room to retire for the night, but he suddenly decided to make a detour to the Room of Requirement. Maybe, it wouldn't be wise for him to be cooped up in the same room as Draco, Crabbe and Goyle right after their spat at the Slytherin Table. He could rest in the Room of Requirement for the night, he realised. He had been escaping to the room more and more frequently these days, whenever he felt confined and suffocated.

The room had been his safe sanctuary, going so far that he had even slept within the room for two nights right after his argument with Draco. The room was indeed magical, and it would appear to be anything that the caster requested for it to be.

For the second time, Harry stopped in mid tracks, his breathing shallow, his mind reeling. What if – what if the room – what if, Harry thought excitedly, he could command the room to connect to a floo network? If it were so, then Harry could always visit his father whenever he wanted to, he realised.

But could it be? Harry knew that there were the five elements of which the room did not provide, and it included food, money, time, space and weather, but it did not include transport, he realised belatedly.

Abandoning all sense of self restraint, he ran towards the Room of Requirement up on the seventh floor. Once he reached the blank stretch of wall, he forced himself to walk, his breathing harsh, three times across the room, wishing hard for a floo network that could connect to outside of Hogwarts.

He clenched his eyes shut as he paced, and at the third round, he forced his eyes open, to see a deep oak door at the wall. He hesitated, his grip on the door's handle before he pushed open, stepping inside warily. The interior was dim, but he could make out a floo network at the opposite end of the room. This time, the room was small, barely larger than his dormitory; as compared to the massive size it was the previous time he sought sanctuary within the rooms.

He walked briskly over to the floo network, and crouched down in front of it, and was not surprised to see a pot of floo powder on the

ground beside where he knelt. His fingers ran through the soft, white powder as he grabbed a handful of floo powder before rising up.

Harry took a deep breath, before hauling the powder towards the floo network and walking into the fire.

"Riddle Manor!"

The earth seemed to spin wildly while his entire body tumbled through space. He caught glimpses of other wizarding houses, and for a split second, his eyes widened. Was that... Professor Dumbledore's office he saw as he spun through the various floo networks? If so, the old man appeared to be bent over something... a pensieve of sorts. Harry almost choked during that moment, but the scene changed as abruptly as it went.

Then he came to a halt, and tumbled down to the rug, coughing as he did so. He straightened slowly, unable to believe that he was really back at Riddle Manor... but he caught sight of his father's familiar study and the portraits of Slytherin that hung on the walls.

The door towards Harry's left opened and his father stepped into the room, scowling angrily. A second passed before Voldemort's eye flickered over towards him, and the wand was out in a flash, pointing at him threateningly.

"Hello father," Harry said, unable to resist grinning at his father's reaction.

Voldemort held the wand between his fingers, his eyes calculative and suspicious, before he seemed to relax slightly and walked over to his desk before sitting down on the comfortable chair behind the table.

"You could have let me know that you were coming over, Harrison," Voldemort said, his voice annoyed but Harry knew better. His father was pleased to see him. "You know better than to appear out of nowhere. I could have cursed you."

Harry gave an apologetic glance. "I was testing out if this would work..." He shrugged and settled himself over his father's table, pushing the stacks of paper as he did so. "And it did." He pointedly

ignored his father's menacing glare at him for messing his table and chuckled instead.

"And what is troubling you now?" Voldemort said, going straight to the point as he ruffled through the stack of papers sitting on his desk. Harry hopped out of the table and settled himself on the chair in front of his father's desk.

He sighed. "I think that my magic is going through... a changing process," Harry admitted grudgingly. He had no idea how he knew what was ailing him and his fluctuating mood. This realisation seemed to have come out of nowhere. "You know, it's the period when I have to choose the affinity for my magic in order for the magic to co-exist peacefully." Harry continued, seeming to be explaining to himself.

Voldemort raised his eye brows slightly. "It only happens when you come of age, Harrison."

"Yes," Harry said slowly. "But I think – maybe, the Le Fey Curse had a hand in its early... manifestation?" Harry suggested.

"You have not been using the Curse for a long time, Harrison. Only during your brief periods of training was the Curse active. It would have slowed down the complete manifestation of the Curse into your magical core," Voldemort said, frowning slightly. "Unless of course, you have used it recently."

"I er – I have," Harry admitted sheepishly. Voldemort looked at him, his face in surprise and disapproval. "During the murder of Amelia Bones, I might have used the Curse to tear down her wards."

Now his father was nodding thoughtfully. "I should have realised," Voldemort said. "Her wards were highly advanced, with some of the most advanced runes involved. It was a wonder that you managed to dismantle the wards."

Harry had nothing to reply.

"Then again, the whole process will take a year, or slightly less than that before your affinity is decided. During this time, your moods may take a change – becoming more heated or numbing and you might find wild bouts of magic occasionally."

"I think I've felt the mood change," Harry said dryly.

"For the better or for the worse?" His father's voice was amused now.

Harry huffed. "Both, actually."

A smirked quirked at Voldemort's lips. "That hardly comes as a surprise. You have a way of tempting fate. But the changing process is not the main reason for your visit, is it now?"

Harry bowed his head slightly. "You know me too well," Harry smirked then his smile died down and frowned. "It's regarding the mission which you have imposed on Draco."

Voldemort leaned back on his chair, his head resting on the head rest and his eyes closed for a moment. "Ah yes, the mission for young Malfoy? And what exactly is your concern for that now, Harrison?"

"You know what I mean," Harry said pointedly. "Draco can hardly complete the mission and the penalty is too severe. He would grow to be one of your Inner Circle in time to come." Harry said, trying to reason with his father.

Voldemort snapped his eyes open and eyed him with a gaze. "I have complete confidence in our young Malfoy heir."

"But Father —" Harry protested.

"And with your help, it should go smoothly," Voldemort continued and Harry's protest died on his lips. Harry frowned instead, contemplating if he should tell Voldemort about his argument with Draco.

"Yet you have fallen out, so what should happen?"

Harry snapped his head up. "You knew?" he said accusingly.

Voldemort smiled winningly. "Lord Voldemort knows everything."

"Should have realised," Harry muttered to himself. Then he raised his voice slightly. "I've been thinking for a long time, if I should tell

them of my past..." his voice trailed off. "But what if... what if..." Harry's voice faltered.

"What if, they should desert you?" Voldemort finished.

Harry nodded.

"It would prove to be a test, for young Malfoy and Travers, would it not be? Their loyalty should lie in you, regardless of your heritage," Voldemort said, doubtlessly remembering about his own past with the Slytherins and his suspicious heritage. "And yet, there is the simple spell of Obliviation should they prove unworthy of this information."

Harry's eyes widened in surprise. "You – you would let me tell them about – about Harry Potter? But if you knew that we had fallen out, then why would you? I mean – they might tell Dumbledore, or something..."

"My dear Harry, your past will surface eventually," Voldemort said smugly. "The taste of revenge which you crave will only be heightened if the Potters knew who they were pitting themselves against. Their own blood. At such a time, it is inevitable that all would know who you were, and what transpired all those years back when you left the Potter manor for good. It would doubtlessly benefit you should your friends know of your circumstances before."

"But if they –"

"Your friends have proved themselves worthy, regardless of what young Malfoy has said. It is your decision to make, but if you use your heritage well, you will find that it can prove to be your advantage, the weapon."

"Yet even before knowing about my heritage, we have fought, so shouldn't it show that they can't really be trusted? Or be trusted enough to be told, Father. This is of quite... major importance," he said grudgingly. "Now isn't the best time for me to tell them, especially when we – well, when everything is messed up."

"They would be your loyal servants in future, Harry, whether you like it or not. They will be under your order – our orders. Telling them of your identity is also a step of controlling them. You might be

opposed to the idea of leading your friends but you understand that they will be yours to command in future. Ensuring their loyalty no matter your decisions and heritage is part of your responsibility."

"I understand, father," Harry said slowly, his mind whirling. So, he would tell Draco and Celeste? Yet if they turned their backs on him, he would have to Oblivate them. He wasn't worried about the spell work, but if even his friends wouldn't accept his past, then how would he ever have a say within the Death Eaters when the truth is revealed?

He remembered a Chinese phrase which he had heard during one of his expeditions in China. 纸是包不住火 – the truth will have to be revealed one day, regardless of how he tried to hide it. The prospect of throwing his identity back into the faces of Joshua, Lily, Dumbledore and the others when he was in control of the war highly appealed to him, after how they had denied his rights and his powers years ago.

Yes, Harry decided. Draco and Celeste's support would highly benefit him if he wanted the Death Eater's continued support despite his obvious Light heritage. If the Malfoys and Travers' were supportive of him, there would be less resistance, especially if he had the support of Lucius Malfoy. The Death Eaters could not protest under Lord Voldemort's reign, but he preferred to have their submission not out of fear, but of respect and of their own willingness. Their support was what mattered in this war, for the army to be united under Voldemort, why he would tell Celeste and Draco of the truth. If they did not support him, and wanted to stay away, then it was his luck.

His telling of the truth sounded highly of convenience for himself, but he reminded himself again, that the war was what mattered, why he would take advantage of his friends' support. His helping of Draco's mission, it was for the war. His friendship with Celeste was for her influence as a Travers. But he could not help feeling that he might not be able to cast away his friends so easily, if they didn't accept his past. There was still that sliver, that shard of humanity and emotions within him. He accepted that he could never be like his father, but if needed, he knew that one day, perhaps, he had to part ways with his friends.

But could he?

Harry shook his head, unwilling to think about that subject. Despite what Draco had said, he still could not leave him in the lurch, after knowing the consequences if Draco failed the mission. He sighed – years of friendship could not be broken off as easily as a mere argument, no matter the content of it. He would have to work on that somehow, he couldn't form such bonds in the middle of the war. His friendships with Celeste and Draco could be used against him – as means of blackmail if they were ever captured.

"And incidentally, might I ask how you gained access to the floo network?"

Harry tilted his head upwards, startled slightly as his father spoke. It took him a moment to register his father's words before a small grin tug at the corners of his lips.

"The Room of Requirement," he said with a tinge of smugness at the brilliance of his idea. It would prove to be helpful in the future. Though, now that he thought of it, could the floo network be used to transport the Death Eaters into Hogwarts? He quickly raised the point to Voldemort who contemplated the issue for a moment, before shaking his head slightly.

"Hogwarts has ancient wards, designed to keep out intruders," Voldemort explained, his hand twirling a quill loosely as he stared into space at Slytherin's portrait. "The headmaster has the power to access the wards, and no doubt, that the ancient wards have been keyed only to allow Hogwarts students into the castle. All the floo networks and specific apparition points would be ineffective for the Death Eater's entrance."

Harry grumbled sullenly. So much for the inspiration.

"But if we used a vanishing cabinet?" he pressed on.

Voldemort chuckled. "So that is young Malfoy's plan?" Voldemort paused as he considered Harry's words. Apparently, Voldemort knew about Vanishing Cabinets. "Yes," he conceded after a while. "It might work, seeing that the vanishing cabinet is not part of Hogwarts's wards. It is an item brought into the castle and quite unprotected by Hogwarts."

Harry felt relief washing over him. At least there was a way – no matter how broken that way was – into Hogwarts. It was the first step and the only obstacle in the way was to ensure that the cabinet was fixed. Harry felt slightly more assured as he made his way back to the floo network after his father dismissed him. True, he was nowhere close to finding out how to fix that damned cabinet, but it was a start, knowing that the cabinet was a safe option.

He was still pondering about how to fix the cabinet that he was unaware of his surroundings, even as he stepped out of the floo network and slowly made his way across the Room of Requirement and back to the Slytherin dormitories. His hand grasped the handle of the room's oak door and he pushed open, blinking at the sudden brightness outside the room, before his eyes found a familiar person.

"Where have you been?" Celeste exclaimed.

Harry's eyes wandered to beside her, but he paused at the sight of the person standing beside Celeste.

Draco Malfoy.

—

What's your opinion: Should Harry reveal his identity?

15. Amongst Other Things

Harry's eyes narrowed at the sight before him, before turning accusingly towards Celeste and frowning slightly. The girl flashed him an apologetic grimace, followed by a pointed look towards Draco, who suddenly looked immensely uncomfortable and was looking everywhere but at Harry, which Harry would have found amusing if it wasn't so irritating. Draco tilted his head up slowly and met Harry's eyes, before quickly turning away, his pale face flushing. Harry sighed. It looked like Draco wasn't prepared for an apology as of yet.

He pushed past Draco, turning into the corridor and began to walk off until Draco decided to gather his Gryffindor courage (or lack thereof, Harry corrected himself mentally). He heard a sudden shout from behind him.

"I'm sorry!"

Harry continued walking.

"I'm sorry for what I said, I didn't mean any of it!" the voice was panicked, almost desperate now, with a slight hint of pleading audible, but barely so. Harry paused in mid step, and the speaker seemed to grab hold of the opportunity for footsteps quickly descended towards Harry's direction.

Draco caught his arm and spun him around, while Celeste slowly walked towards them, her expression veiled and guarded. Her eyes were expressionless, though Harry could detect a hint of approval towards Draco within the stoic blank mask. He raised his eyebrows at her and she shrugged casually, her long hair swinging backwards.

Harry turned back to Draco, amused to find him clinging onto his hand in a slightly desperate sort of manner.

"I know I was horrible, but I didn't mean any of it, what I said that time – days ago," Draco said hurriedly, tripping over some of his words. "I was angry then, because of the dismissive way you took this whole mission, and I really thought that you knew how it could work, but it... it..."

Draco cast his eyes down and his shoulders noticeably sagged. Harry was sure that very few people had ever caught the Malfoy Heir looking this way, desperate and pleading instead of proud and haughty.

"I... Harry, I..."

"Give me a reason why I should forgive you," Harry said simply, his eyes boring into Draco's. Draco faltered slightly, hesitating as his eyes frantically searched for Celeste, as though hoping for some idea what to say. Celeste seemed to favor ignoring him, her eyes on Harry's, waiting for a decision.

Seconds ticked by, and Harry turned away, preparing to walk off. So much for Draco's determination, he thought wryly. It looked as though Malfoys do not bend their egoistic neck no matter in what time. Yet he seemed to hear a panicked choked yell behind him, followed by a sigh of pittance and exasperation and for the second time in five minutes, his arm was grabbed and he was spun around. Only this time, his eyes found Celeste's who looked faintly amused by the situation.

Celeste laughed softly. "Alright, Harry, that's enough," she said, greeting Harry as per usual. Harry allowed a smirk to grace his features, just as he caught sight of Draco walking briskly towards them, hope lighting up his normally blank mercury eyes.

"Harry?" Draco said, hopefully, tentatively. "You – er – forgive me?" Draco stuttered, for the first time in a long while.

Harry frowned slightly, leaning back against the wall and folding his arms across his chest as he made a show of surveying Draco from top to bottom and laughed inwardly when Draco squirmed under his scrutinizing gaze.

Then Harry allowed a small smile to break through his expressionless countenance.

"I had no idea I seemed so unforgiving," Harry mused aloud.

Draco's eyes widened comically and an elated smile stretched across his face. "You had no idea!" Draco said excitedly, his voice rising slightly before he caught himself with a careful look around the

corridor. "Merlin, you can be quite scary at times. It's like looking at Dark Lord Junior, when your expressions are completely closed off." Draco babbled on, his previous silent, sullen mood gone, replaced by an excited tone which seemed to radiate waves of relief and joy.

Celeste's voice now joined theirs. "Well, I thought that was a Malfoy trait," she said wryly.

"It is!" Draco protested furiously. It was slightly bemusing how Draco could remain arrogant, proud and snobby in company of Gryffindors, without much of a flicker of emotion if the world exploded before him, but could react so fiercely around Celeste and Harry, feeling the need to defend his family. Draco was always protective of his family, quick to defend the Malfoys, especially Narcissa Malfoy, from what Harry heard. Draco was particularly close to his mother, who seemed to take it upon her duty to see Harry as her second son.

Harry rolled his eyes. "The Duelling Tournament is tomorrow, what do you say to a slight head start?" He said, while walking back towards the direction of the Room of Requirement.

"You know me so well," came a voice from behind him.

X

Restless murmurs rang through the hall, particularly from the sixth and seventh years, all of whom wore looks of sheer excitement upon their faces, their wands twirling in their hands nervously as they cast wary glances towards the Slytherin table.

It was the day of the Duelling Tournament, round one.

Harry was sitting at the Slytherin table with his Housemates, where he noted that they had submitted to the urge to converse during meal times, a breach of the normal pureblood etiquette restricting most of their conversations in meals, except for the usual small talk. The Slytherins eyes constantly flickered towards the other houses and different expressions graced their sharp eyes.

Their eyes met the Ravensclaws' with a slight smirk, of a tiny measure of respect and challenge in them. When upon the Gryffindors', a look of sheer superiority overtook them and were marred with faint traces of contempt and silent promise to defeat the

lions. The Hufflepuffs... the majority avoided eye contact with the Slytherins, and when an unfortunate Hufflepuff caught the eye contact of a Slytherin, he or she would quickly avert their sight, but not before catching the malicious glint within the Slytherins' eyes which promised that they would suffer if they entered the tournament.

A sharp kick to his foot caught his attention and his head snapped up, to face Celeste. The moment his eyes locked into hers, she glanced towards her right and Harry followed her gaze. His eyes met four angry black ones, four contracted eyebrows and two grimaces etched on two enormous heads.

Crabbe and Goyle were staring at him, identical furious expressions on their face as they watched him sitting next to Draco, who was talking to the now attentive Celeste and unaware of the surroundings. The next moment, Harry watched coolly as the two enormous Slytherins turned away from them, to glare at some unfortunate Hufflepuff instead.

Interesting... It looked as though Harry had usurped their position as Draco's sidekicks, from what he heard from Draco. Harry hadn't managed to had much of a chance to talk to the two, except when he was six and they barged into the Malfoy Library, much to his displeasure. Well, Harry shrugged his shoulders. He was certainly not Draco's sidekick, and it didn't bother him too much about the glares that were shooting daggers into him, although he did find it annoying.

At last, mercifully to Harry who was getting bored and irritated with the slow proceedings, the Duelling Tournament was due to start. His magical changing process was making his mood fluctuate wildly, and he certainly did not need that distraction during the Tournament. Of course he had no qualms on who would qualify to the second round – his years of training would not come to naught or he would surely be disgracing his father.

His brother, though... that was an entirely different matter. Harry narrowed his eyes maliciously as his eyes sought the lithe form of Joshua, over at the Gryffindor table. The Chosen One was surrounded with people as usual, the Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws coming over to pat his back and wish him good luck. The normal silly grin on his face was there as he valiantly tried to

ward of his ardent fans – which seemed to have decreased, Harry noted smugly.

The chair scraped noisily as the students scampered out of their seats to and to the side of the Great Hall when Dumbledore entered the room with two other Professors, Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall behind him. The Slytherins were much more reserved, taking their time to rise out of their seats, as they had all been taught since the moment they could walk.

The instant everyone was out of their seats, Dumbledore raised his wand as did the other two professors. A moment later, the four house tables vanished, to be replaced by a raised platform stretching across almost the entire Great Hall, leaving empty space on either side, for the spectators to watch.

Excited murmurs rose through the crowd as Dumbledore stepped onto the platform. Eyes were upon him at once, silence descending like a blanket upon the previously cacophonous room. Professor Snape stood impressively beside Dumbledore, sneering at the wary Gryffindors.

"Welcome! Welcome to the Duelling Tournament hosted by both the Durmstrang Institute and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!" Dumbledore's voice echoed in the Great Hall, and as he welcomed the students, his head turned towards Headmaster Karkaroff, standing at the side of the Great Hall, scowling for no apparent reason, having declined to start the tournament.

"As much as I am aware of how terribly excited everyone is, I'm afraid that the rules have to be laid down. Rules will be rules and any, when I say any, I mean any, infringement of rules will warrant you a disqualification," Dumbledore said, his voice taking the disapproving grandfatherly tone. The next moment, his cheery voice was back. "I will now let Professor Snape brief you on the first round of the tournament."

A sudden swish of robes, and a scowling Professor Snape stepped forward from his place at Dumbledore's side. An instant silence descended upon the crowds of students, who had started to converse again, with a mere touch of Snape's aura hanging threateningly and dangerously over their heads.

"The first round is also known as the Master's Trickery Round. It is customary to start the first round with all duelists participating and with free rein, leaving no rules except to not kill nor grievously maim the opponents. A wizard can simply choose to be on the defensive and attempt to remain within the round. Trickery is needed to stay clear and emerge the last eight students standing in order to proceed to the second round."

Murmurings graced the crowds.

"And I shall warn you once, if there is any sign that you have fallen to the wand of another witch or wizard, the protective boundary would take charge to banish you out of the platform. No arguments are to be made."

Harry smiled coldly. The Trickery Round was so obviously Slytherin's creation. To stay clear of the opponents while one watched as others fought one another. It was like borrowing another's knife to kill your enemies. One could stay clear of it, and watch as the foolish people wiped themselves out with their own wands.

A simple Disillusionment charm would suffice.

"Let the duel begin!"

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"You can't be serious! Professor Dumbledore?"

"I assure you, Mr Potter, that is not my choice to make," Professor Dumbledore attempted to sooth the enraged Chosen One.

They were the last eight students, standing in the platform. Amongst them were Celeste, Draco (who would have been kicked out from a stray underhand curse if Harry had not pulled him out of the way), Harrison himself, Ron Weasley (much to Draco's disgust), Hermione Granger, Lea Donovan, Isaac Dravyers (to Celeste's disappointment) and the Chosen One.

"But Professor! I can't possibly win the tournament if I'm grouped with Riddle!" Joshua protested fiercely.

The groupings of the second round of the Duelling Tournament had just been finalized. The eight participants were categorized into two groups, with four participants per group. Round Two would be a group tournament, whereby the last standing person enabled his group to proceed to the Third Round. It was both challenging and frustratingly irritating for Harry, who had to be tied to his group members, to other people. He could either pass onto the third round with Joshua, or be kicked out at the second round.

Four out of the eight would be disqualified this round. It would be either Group A or B.

"I assure you, Potter, that it is not our pleasure to be within the same group as the Chosen One." Celeste interrupted Joshua's whining smoothly. She shot a glare at Hermione in contempt.

Harry tried to ignore Draco's gaze... Draco was on the other group after all. As fate would have it, Harry, Celeste, Joshua and Hermione made up the first group. At least the bright side was that Isaac Dravyers would not be in the same group as Harry... a plus sign, within the midst of the depressing negatives.

"Ah, but let the past be the past. Good day," Professor Dumbledore chuckled merrily as he patted Joshua's shoulders absentmindedly before making his way out of the Great Hall, completely ignoring the tense atmosphere behind.

The group dispersed, and Harry was about to make his way out of the Great Hall when a loud, booming voice caught his attention and a fat man came waddling towards Harry, clearly panting and out of breath.

"Mr Riddle, m'boy!" The man greeted heartily when he reached Harry.

"Professor Slughorn?" Harry said warily, aware that Celeste and Draco had paused mid step beside him. He discreetly motioned for them to make a move first, and they did so hesitantly.

"You did spectacularly just now, Mr Riddle. A Disillusionment charm was all that was needed to grant you a pass to the second round... why I have never seen trickeries like yours... you make a fine, fine duelist indeed, Mr Riddle..."

Harry tried to look appropriately abashed and modest, a tentative smile gracing his features. "Thank you, Professor," he replied, attempting to make himself appear flattered by the praise. He let the sincerity clear in his eyes. "It means a lot to me," he continued quietly and mentally congratulated himself when he saw the Professor relax and a wide smile overtake his previously tense features.

"Harry m'boy... you wouldn't mind if I call you Harry, would you?"

"Of course not, Professor..."

"Why, I haven't met a student as delightful and charming as you since... but the resemblance is uncanny, but... if Professor Dumbledore won't say much... it can't have been you..." Professor Slughorn's voice seemed to trail off as he stared into space.

"Professor?"

Slughorn jumped. "Ah yes, Harry. Would you do me the honour of joining my Slug Club? It's a little club of mine for certain... privileged students, I would be most glad if you would consider attending club sessions. Just the week before we met the such delightful people, Mr Underwood from the Department of Mysteries even... we hardly see the Unspeakables, of course." Slughorn clapped his hand. "Does this offer sound tempting to you, Mr Riddle? I would be honoured, most honoured indeed..."

Harry made a show of thinking and hesitating before he nodded. "Of course, Professor. It would be my honour to join the Slug Club."

A large smile beamed on Slughorn's face and Harry had barely refrained from snorting at the relieved and greedy expression on his face.

A clap on Harry's back –

"Well Harry, I would see you soon for the club sessions then! The next session will be Monday, at my office right around the corner from the statue of Herrick the Violent. Ask any of your housemates and they will gladly guide you there. How about Blaise Zabini? He's another delightful boy of your age indeed..."

Harry choked and Slughorn turned towards him in alarm. He passed it off as a cough with another sheepish grin and Slughorn merely patted him on his back heartily.

Zabini was a delightful boy.

Indeed.

X

The next two weeks passed as normal. Harry, with the help of a couple of shortcuts he found during his night time exploration of Hogwarts, avoided both his fan-base and Slughorn, who seemed to have taken Harry as his new found interest and was paying him more attention than he would have liked.

Amongst that all, he managed to find time to spend with Draco and Celeste. The previous fight seemed to have done miracles on Draco, in Harry's opinions at least. He knew that most people would rather not forgive Draco so easily – at one point, he idly considered letting Draco fight a couple of Dragons and a sphinx or two to win his forgiveness – but like Celeste said, there was no friendship on earth that was smooth-sailing.

Yet he still had not been presented with an opportunity to disclose his identity. His father's words were constantly surfacing in his thoughts; in the mornings, between lessons, during meals... it was slowly getting to him, and Harry didn't like to be bothered by unsolved issues. With the approaching weekend, it seemed as though the perfect time had come. The thought of finally not needing to hide information about his very birth excited him a little. It would have been nice to talk to someone around his age, and not just a Dark Lord father.

This setting, the Room of Requirement on a peaceful Friday evening, wasn't what Harry had envisioned though. He might have thought that his identity would be slipped during a battle against the Order of the Phoenix, or some other dramatic event, perhaps. It certainly didn't come to him that it might just be an ordinary – or not so ordinary after all – Friday, in the Room of Requirement, where they were lounging. It was past curfew, not that they particularly heeded the rules of Hogwarts.

Draco and Celeste were in a heated discussion on the rights of a witch in Wizarding society and Harry was half-listening to their conversation as he mused over his decision to tell them. He had no idea how he would be doing it though. Sure, he had given it some thought, or maybe slightly more than that over the past two weeks, but there was no concrete way of admitting it without an overreaction from Draco, or the suspicions from Celeste.

Harry straightened up and turned to face Celeste and Draco who were sitting on the sofa opposite him.

"... Erm, I..." Harry mentally berated himself. It wasn't like him to stutter. Unfortunately, a particularly loud outburst from Draco broke his train of thoughts.

"Well I'm telling you now, Celeste. The rights of a witch are more than justified now in the wizarding society!" Draco's voice was shrill. "In what way are they biased?"

Celeste shook her head furiously. "Nonsense! I could tell you all about Lady Alma and the injustice she faced because she wasn't a male! And besides..."

"Did you know Joshua Potter had a twin brother?"

Draco continued spluttering for a second or two before he choked mid-word and whirled around to face Harry, his hand hanging in mid-air, hovering near Celeste's head. Celeste jumped slightly and turned towards Harry. Silence met Harry's words.

"Um... what?" Draco said eloquently, his hand now moving to scratch his ear. Celeste sat up straighter.

"I said, did you know Joshua Potter had a twin brother?"

Draco turned towards Celeste and the both of them shared a look before he turned back towards Harry, his hand now smoothing his slick blond hair unconsciously. His expression changed into one of confusion as he tilted his head up to Harry.

"Are we supposed to...?"

Harry murdered himself in his mind once more. Yes, he could admit it to himself. He sounded weird. What sort of person interrupts into a conversation involving a witch's rights, asking about the twin brother of their supposed enemy?

Right, he did.

"Harry..." Celeste's voice was uncertain. "Is ... Is there something you wanted to tell us? Is this what you were hiding from us...?"

Harry bit his lower lip and nodded slightly.

Draco's eyes widened. "What does this have to do with Potter's twin? Wasn't Joshua Potter the only child of the Potters? I have never heard of this so called twin before... does he have anything to do with this... this war?" Draco asked bewilderedly, his arms waving in the air.

Harry took a deep breath. "Yes... he has something to do with this war. He is not widely known because he was overshadowed by his brother."

"But... but Harry, why are we talking about Potter's brother? Where is he now, anyway?"

Harry stilled for a moment, not meeting Draco's eyes, but fixing his stare on a portrait behind Draco's head. His eyes... his eyes felt funny, it seemed as though he could never forget his past...

"Harry Potter does not exist anymore. He left the Potters house when he was six, having been neglected by his parents for so long. For the longest time ever, Harry Potter was sidelined, forgotten, the moment Joshua became the Chosen One. Harry Potter ran away, yet, unknowingly, that decision changed the war."

Celeste leaned forward and looked squarely into Harry's eyes for a long moment before she said slowly, "Harry..." her voice lowered. "Is there something... you wanted to tell us, about Harry Potter? How did you know so much about him...? Does the Dark Lord know about this? Is there something more to Potter's twin that we should know...? If he ran away from home all those years ago, was he... was he ever found?"

Harry paused for a moment. "Yes. He was found. Found by father."

"But- but Harry!" Draco spluttered. "How- how could this...? How would you know about all this...? About Harry Potter? Why would he be at all important towards this war? The Chosen One is the key to the war... so what does Joshua Potter's runaway long lost brother have to do with this...? With anything? Does Harry Potter have any involvement with this war? Is he essential to it?"

Harry broke away from Celeste's worried gaze to face Draco.

"Yes, Harry Potter plays a key role in the war. Because... I was Harry Potter."

A/N

I'm back! After a 5 months break... sorry for making everyone wait for so long.

First off I want to clarify that I have changed my pen name, because there was some error with my previous pen name. So here I am, not an imposter.

Back to topic, to tell the truth, I'm not really happy with this chapter, because of the length for one; it wasn't quite elaborated as I wanted it to be, but I couldn't drag this any longer. Basically I've already had the entire story planned up till its epilogue in chapter 40, but the only problem is having to write everything down, so I'm going slower now, as I keep getting sidetracked by my other things in life.

Thanks for everyone who supported this story even in the long break! I'll try to update faster, but it really depends because my exams are coming again.

Chp16